



Gentle Reminders for Traumatic Loss Survivors

By Buffy Peters

The kind of grief you are experiencing is incredibly difficult. Please remember...

- This is **YOUR** natural and normal response to a death that is likely being experienced as traumatic. Everyone experiences trauma and grief differently. You don't have to compare your reactions to this loss to someone else's.
- **ALL** of your feelings are valid...even the ones that you are judging yourself for – *guilt, shame, blame, perhaps even relief*...
 - That does not mean that all the feelings you feel are factually true. Sometimes additional factual information can help ease some of these feelings, but it takes time for your head and heart to come together. Allow yourself to feel how you feel, find ways to process those emotions (get them out of your head and body) and try to not judge whatever feelings come up for you.
- The support from a professional can make a world of difference with troublesome responses to trauma, such as flashbacks, nightmares, or coping with intense feelings like guilt.
- There are some answers you may never get -- or that may never feel satisfactory. You will have to come to a place of understanding that works for you. And that understanding may be different for each person impacted by your loved one's death.
- When someone asks how your person died, you do not have to answer...you do not *owe* anyone an explanation.
 - One caveat to this: I believe it's important to be honest about the cause of death with those who are close to your person who died, as it can help them to process the death and their grief.
 - **But** - someone who is asking just because they are curious...*you get to decide!*
 - So many fear the question and how to respond that they avoid talking about their person altogether. Please don't let this fear hinder you from talking about your person.
 - Consider coming up with a response to that question so you're prepared if and when it comes up. It can be as simple as, "I'd rather not talk about that." While it might feel impolite to not answer, asking someone how their loved one died – especially when it is simply out of curiosity -- is actually much more impolite!

- Give yourself (and those around you) as much grace as you can muster.
- This kind of grief often takes even longer to reach a place where you can begin to integrate the loss into your life and heart as you move forward. This does not mean there is anything “wrong” with you. Be patient with yourself, find ways to express your grief that work for you, surround yourself with others who treat you with patience and kindness and take extra good care of yourself.
- One day you will experience lighter, more joyful emotions once again. It may feel impossible right now, but I have learned from many who are further down this road, that you can and you will. It may feel different—perhaps more nuanced than before—but joy will return. *Perhaps it is already here, even in the smallest way.*
- **Grief & Joy** can absolutely co-exist. Feeling joy is not disrespectful to your loved one, or a disgrace to their memory—it's part of living the life you didn't choose but were given, and living it more fully.
- Your person is not defined by the ending of their life. Your person is and was so much more than their final moments. It is a part of their life story and while it feels like such a big part of the story, it isn't the whole story. You get to remember and honor all of who they were...the good times, the not so great times, and everything in between.