

Some powerful thoughts on the grief process...

“Grief, when it comes, is nothing we expect it to be...Grief has no distance. Grief comes in waves, paroxysms, sudden apprehensions that weaken the knees and blind the eyes and obliterate the dailiness of life. Virtually everyone who has experienced grief mentions this phenomenon of “waves”...sensations of somatic distress occurring in waves lasting from twenty minutes to an hour at a time, a feeling of tightness in the throat, choking with shortness of breath, need for sighing, and an empty feeling in the abdomen, lack of muscular power, and an intense subjective distress described as tension or mental pain.” (Joan Didion, “The Year of Magical Thinking” pp27-28)

“Phillippe Aries, in a series of lectures he delivered at Johns Hopkins in 1973 and later published as “Western Attitudes toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present,” noted that beginning about 1930 there had been in most Western countries and particularly in the United States a revolution in accepted attitudes toward death. “Death,” he wrote “so omnipresent in the past that it was familiar, would be effaced, would disappear. It would become shameful and forbidden.” The English social anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer, in his 1965 “Death, Grief, and Mourning,” had described this rejection of public mourning as a result of the increasing pressure of a new “ethical duty to enjoy oneself,” a novel “imperative to do nothing which might diminish the enjoyment of others.” In both England and the United States, he observed, the contemporary trend was “to treat mourning as a morbid self-indulgence, and to give social admiration to the bereaved who hide their grief so fully that no one would guess anything had happened.” (Joan Didion, “The Year of Magical Thinking” p60)

“Death is nothing at all. I have only slipped away into the next room. I am I, you are you. Whatever we were to each other, that we still are. Call me by my old familiar name, speak to me in the easy way which you always used to. Put no difference in your tone, wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow. Laugh as we always laughed at the little jokes we enjoyed together. Play, smile, think of me, pray for me. Let my name be ever the household word that it always was. Let it be spoken without effort, without the trace of a shadow on it. Life means all that it ever meant. It is the same as it ever was; there is unbroken continuity. Why should I be out of mind because I am out of sight. I am waiting for you, for an interval, somewhere very near, just round the corner. All is well.” (Henry Scott Holland, Canon of St. Paul’s Cathedral 1847-1918)