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About Grief: Insights, Setback, Grace Notes, Taboos

Brian Shuff
Ron Marasco
Hardcover $22.95 (212pp)
978-1-56663-858-6

About Grief creates a safe haven for the suffering and their family, friends, and co-workers.

Placing the book in context, Ron Marasco and Brian Shuff write, “All the stories and information in this book are here for one reason: to help you realize that you are not the only one.” Their language is contemporary, driving the message home without sugar coating: “Our aim is to make you feel less lonely, and frankly, less nuts.”

The authors discovered that “If you talk about grief openly and honestly, people will talk back.” This sentence sets the stage for a book-long conversation about compassionate and insightful thinking. “We don’t do grief,” writes Joan Didion. “Yet grief still does us,” state the authors. The cultural imperative to put on a happy face resonates with readers. The implied imperative is to “act as if,” to pretend that sadness is not part of each minute of each day.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross famously defined the five stages of grieving in *On Death and Dying* in 1969: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. However, the acclaimed psychiatrist noted that those experiencing a cataclysmic loss do not trudge through every stage or in a unified order. Marasco and Shuff incorporate the Kübler-Ross model in their “trajectory of grieving.”

For the literary addicts among us, the book references Joan Didion’s *Magical Thinking*, a gut wrenching account of the death of her husband, writer John Gregory Dunne. Luminaries who weigh-in on the subject of grief include C.S. Lewis, Colette, Shakespeare, Dorothy Parker, Edith Wharton, and Woody Allen. An extensive index guides the reader to more significant names, among them Martin Luther King, Steve Martin, and Arthur Miller.

According to Marasco and Shuff, a thread running through the minds of those encircling the mourner is that they must “do” something. Concurrently, they write about the people who do not know what to say or do, creating awkward moments or avoidance.

During the aftermath of 9/11, the authors cite the visit to the New York Amory by the New York Yankees and their manager Joe Torre. Once there, the venerated players wondered what they could do for the tightly wound, distraught, and hopeful families awaiting news. Outfielder Bernie Williams met the challenge head-on and said, “I don’t know what to say, but you look like you need a hug.”

About Grief is a love letter and a sympathy note validating the pain of those coping with loss. For family, friends, and acquaintances of the bereaved the book is a gentle instruction guide.

Ron Marasco is a professor, writer, and actor. He teaches a course on the literature and drama of grief. Brian Shuff recently published a collection of short stories. The duo previously wrote a screenplay together.
DINDY YOKEL (June 21, 2011)

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