

- Here goes -

"No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing". C.S. Lewis - 'A Grief Observed'

And no one ever does... tell you what grief feels like.

Grief is no fun. Never has been, never will. It may have its moments of purity and beauty, but it is never without pain. So why talk about it at all? Why tell anyone what grief is REALLY like? First of all, those who have never been there, basically don't have a clue; and they much prefer it that way. They'd rather not talk about it. (You know, people with loss could be contagious.) And those who have lost on the other hand, want to forget as soon as they can. (You know, one must carry on.)

"Each grief is different, even if they bear similarities." Douglas Gresham, stepson of C.S. Lewis

I could relate a lot to Lewis's search in grief. Disarmingly honest and even heart-warming. But all through his writings one thought kept creeping up: YOU had a chance to say goodbye. YOU and HER, you could say farewell.

These days thousands of people die without their loved ones. They see them off to the Covid-19 ward and trust that they will come out fully dressed and not in a bodybag. But many don't. They do get carried out in the bag. Without a hug, without a kiss, without farewell. Without peace.

I've had my share of grief in life. Both with and without a chance to say farewell. And let me assure you, the latter is far, far worse. And if

fate really has it in for you, you might still be in the midst of life. Bit past halfway perhaps.

These pages are for all those people who have lost. Be it people, be it pets, be it money or power, be it abuse, lack of love or being rejected. Loss invariably gets to you and is one of the hardest things to deal with. And not being prepared, not being able to say farewell only makes it worse. A lot worse. I merely wish to shed some light on how I dealt with my own bereavement. Maybe, just maybe, some of you may find some beauty and perhaps some softening of your burden.

After 10 years of having lost my wife in a freak accident and having kept journals ever since (referred to as LGBs¹), I assess my grief, my mourning, my coping and my outlook upon my own demise.

¹ The LGBs are literally Little Green Books. They bear a title, but are also referred to as LGB1, LGB2, etc.

This is a Book about Love

- I - The Dog

“Love is the only sane and satisfactory answer to the problem of human existence².” Erich Fromm – ‘The art of loving’

Three weeks before, our Leonberger, the most easygoing and most loveable one of the family had to be put to sleep. The pain of his progressing cancer was becoming too atrocious. We had to let go of him. We sent him off gently, the family all gathered around him, kissing, cuddling, feeding him cookies and giving him the last bit of love we had. I am sure he was, even then, returning it. My friend P came along for the second time in about 20 odd years, to put my four-legged friend out of his misery. He died quietly in my lap. Two days later, he was buried in our garden.

This dog however, had had a life of his own, and had, over the years, collected a number of personal friends that he would meet from time to time, entirely by chance, when I took him with me on social events. Which was often. The dog was well brought up, well behaved and thus joined me most everywhere I went: work, pub, holidays, restaurants, concerts, private parties, theatre, and what have you. And so, he had collected his own personal network of favourites. Since we knew he was poorly, we decided to throw him his own personal party. We invited all his friends (some of which I hardly knew and had never been to our house), to come around for a drink, a nibble and spend some

² What is existence? And what is the meaning of our life if in the end we just die and decompose?

time with their friend: our dog. We knew it would simply make him ecstatic and he would indulge in all the cuddles, caresses and familiar smells that had pleased him for so many years. Hence, a date was fixed, invitations were sent, and preparations were made. However, the cancer got the better of our planning, and by the time the party was to take place -no matter how courageous he was - he could no longer bear the pain and we had to let go of him.

Instead of an orgy of cuddles, the whole event turned into a funeral. He was well and truly buried by the time his friends could join him for the last time. I decided to give him a proper farewell. A send-off that would have him proud. We dedicated a dim lit room to him, where a 20 minute audio-visual presentation of his brief life was portrayed. Then from there a long track of light guided the visitor to the grave where I had buried him days before. On the tombstone he is being honoured by what was truly his virtue: Boatswains' eulogy by Byron's friend, John Hobhouse.

*Near this Spot
are deposited the Remains of one
who possessed Beauty without Vanity,
Strength without Insolence,
Courage without Ferocity,
and all the virtues of Man without his Vices.
This praise, which would be unmeaning Flattery
if inscribed over human Ashes,
is but a just tribute to the Memory of
BOATSWAIN, a DOG*

Little did I know at the time that I would never be able to grieve over the loss of my eight yearlong and daily companion to whom I had grown so accustomed. Three weeks later I had a bigger fish to fry.

- II - The Accident

“See you tonight, I love you.” Those were my last words said over the phone before leaving to help out a friend with some DIY. I had just started the car to return home when the CEO of her work called and asked me where I was. I said I was just about to leave my friend’s place and go home. She asked me to stay put and she would come and see me instead.

“Is this about M? Is something wrong with her?” I asked.

“There’s been an accident.” I heard.

“What happened?”

“Well, erh, we need to see you about... Yes, we would like to have a word with you. Erh, where are you exactly?”

I realised this was serious and got out of the car. Didn’t want the kids to hear. I asked again what had happened but got no answer. The CEO kept insisting to tell her where I was, so “they” could come and see me.

Where were they? At my doorstep.

Why can’t I drive home? Cause they want to come and see me.

Why?

Amidst this ping-pong discussion, my friend walked up to me and asked what was going on. I snapped at him: “M is dead”. “What?”

“M is dead”.

No reaction at the other end of the line. No “Hang on, don’t jump to conclusions, it’s bad, but not that bad.” Nothing. Utter silence. That’s when I knew. I just knew.