



# Poems and Quotes

If you mention my child's name  
I may cry.  
But if you don't mention it,  
You will break my heart.

– Author Unknown

“Our grief journeys are not about closure; they are about adjustment and staying connected.”

“The Compassionate Friends is about transforming the pain of grief into the elixir of hope. It takes people out of the isolation society imposes on the bereaved and lets them express their grief naturally. With the shedding of tears, healing comes. And the newly bereaved get to see people who have survived and are learning to live and love again.”

– Simon Stephens, founder of The Compassionate Friends

**Lucas** is a 2002 novel by Kevin Brooks about a teenager named Cait who lives on an isolated island off the coast of England and befriends outsider Lucas, eventually falling in love with him. Then Lucas dies. Here are 2 quotes:

“Gone. The saddest word in the language. In any language.”

“It's always hard to lose somebody. It leaves a hole in your heart that never grows back.”

Oh, the comfort, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person; having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words, but to pour them all out, chaff and grain together; knowing that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keep what is worth keeping, and then with the breath of kindness, blow the rest away.

– George Elliot, 19th-century novelist

## The Elephant In The Room

There's an elephant in the room.  
It is large and squatting, so it is hard to get around it.  
Yet we squeeze by with “How are you?” and “I'm fine...”  
And a thousand other forms of trivial chatter.  
We talk about the weather.  
We talk about work.  
We talk about everything else...  
Except the elephant in the room.  
We all know it is there.  
We are thinking about the elephant as we talk together.  
It is constantly on our minds.  
For, you see, it is a very big elephant.  
It has hurt us all.  
But we do not talk about the elephant in the room.  
Oh, please, say her name.  
Oh, please, say “Barbara” again.  
Oh, please, let's talk about the elephant in the room.  
For if we talk about her death,  
Perhaps we can talk about her life.  
Can I say “Barbara” to you and not have you look away:  
For if I cannot,  
then you are leaving me alone...  
in a room...  
with an elephant

– Terry Kettering

*Not everything that is faced can be changed  
but nothing can be changed until it is faced.*

– James Baldwin



## Please Hear What I'm Not Saying

Don't be fooled by me. Don't be fooled by the face I wear,  
For I wear a mask, a thousand masks,  
Masks that I'm afraid to take off, and none of them is me.

Pretending is an art that's second nature with me,  
But don't be fooled, for God's sake don't be fooled.

I give you the impression that I'm secure, that all is sunny  
and unruffled with me,  
Within as well as without, that confidence is my name  
and coolness my game,  
That the water's calm and I'm in command  
and that I need no one,  
But don't believe me. Please. My surface may seem smooth  
But my surface is my mask, my ever-varying and  
ever-concealing mask.  
Beneath lies no complacency. Beneath lies the real me in  
confusion,  
In fear, in aloneness. But I hide this.  
I don't want anybody to know it.

I panic at the thought of my weakness exposed.  
That's why I frantically create a mask to hide behind,  
A nonchalant sophisticated facade, to help me pretend,  
To shield me from the glance that knows.  
But such a glance is precisely my salvation, my only salvation,  
And I know it.  
That is, if it's followed by acceptance, if it's followed by love.  
It's the only thing that can liberate me from myself,  
From my own self-built prison wall,  
From the barriers I so painstakingly erect.  
It's the only thing that will assure me  
of what I can't assure myself,  
that I'm really worth something.  
But I don't tell you this. I don't dare to. I'm afraid to.

I'm afraid your glance will not be followed  
by acceptance and love.  
I'm afraid you'll think less of me, that you'll laugh,  
And your laugh would kill me.  
I'm afraid that deep-down I'm nothing, that I'm just no good,  
and that you will see this and reject me.  
So I play my game, my desperate pretending game,  
With a facade of assurance without and a trembling child  
within.  
And so begins the parade of masks,  
The glittering but empty parade of masks,  
And my life becomes a front.  
I idly chatter to you in the suave tones of surface talk.  
I tell you everything that's really nothing,  
And nothing of what's everything, of what's crying within me.  
So when I'm going through my routine,  
Do not be fooled by what I'm saying.  
Please listen carefully and try to hear what I'm not saying.

– **Barbara's version**

## I am doing fine

I said I'm, doing good  
Then I turned my head and cried.

I smiled and told my eyes to sparkle  
Then I turned my head and cried.

I told a joke and laughed heartily  
Then I turned my head and cried.

I offered comfort and encouragement  
Then I turned my head and cried.

I did what has to be done  
Then I turned my head and cried.

Then I turned my head and cried.  
And felt my broken heart.

– **Charlotte Roberts**  
**TFC/Montgomery**

## Shaggy dog story

An older, tired looking dog wandered into my yard. I could tell from his collar and well fed belly that he had a home and was well taken care of. He calmly came over to me, I gave him a few pats on his head; he then followed me into my house, slowly walked down the hall, curled up in the corner and fell asleep.

An hour later he woke up and went to the door. I let him out. The next day he was back, greeted me in my year, walked inside and resumed his spot in the hall and again slept for almost an hour.

This continued off and on for several weeks. Curious, I pinned a note to his collar: "I would like to find out who the owner of this wonderful sweet dog is and ask if you are aware that almost every afternoon your dog comes to my house for a nap." The next day he arrived for his nap with a different note pinned to his collar: "He lives in a house with 6 children, 2 under the age of 3 – He's trying to catch up on his sleep. Can I come with him tomorrow?"

– **Author Unknown**

## Do They Know?

Do they know what its like to lose a son and have to go on living?  
For him to lose the future that he was supposed to live  
For me to lose mine.

*Do they know?*

Do they know what its like for every day to be a lost dream?  
To see others reach the pinnacles that should have been his  
His dreams left to die

*Do they know?*

Do they know the sadness that I carry for what is forever lost?  
For the shared moments that make up a life together  
Never to exist now

*Do they know?*

Do they know the physical pain of missing him every single day?  
To yearn for a hug, a spontaneous gift of love given so easily  
Never taken for granted again

*Do they know?*

Do they know that I now live in a world forever changed?  
That I know a moment lost can never be regained  
Never waste a moment

*Do they know?*

I hope with every breath in me that they never have to find  
out for themselves.

That they get to watch their children grow up and grow old  
To see the dreams yet to be lived.

*I hope they never know...*

– **Sue McCubbin**  
**April 2010**

*Taken from Work Related Grief Support Newsletter July 2010.*

## Forever Changed

*Can you see the change in me?*

It may not be so obvious to you, I participate  
in family activities,  
I attend family reunions...  
I help plan holiday meals.

*You tell me you are glad to see that I don't cry anymore.*  
But I do cry! When everyone has gone – when it is safe –  
the tears fall. I cry in privacy so my family won't worry.  
I cry until I am exhausted and can finally sleep.

*You tell me you admire my strength  
and my positive attitude.*

But I am not strong I feel that I have lost control;  
and I panic when I think about tomorrow...  
Next week... next year.

*I go about the daily routine of my job, house work trying  
to complete my assigned tasks, not to feel the pain,  
then I drink coffee and smile.*

At times I think I am beginning to heal, but the pain rolls  
over me again with a permanent scar on my heart.

*You tell me that you are glad to see I'm holding up so well.*  
But I'm not holding up well. Sometimes I want to lock  
the door and hide from the world. I spend time with  
my parents, I seem calm and collected. I smile when  
appropriate. But I'm not!

*You tell me it's good to see me back to my "old self".*  
But I will never be back to my "old self". Pain and grief,  
have touched my life... and I am **Forever Changed!!**

– Author unknown

*The Compassionate Friends, Queensland Inc*

***Kind words can be short and easy  
to speak, but their echoes are  
truly endless.***

– Mother Teresa

## Listen

When I ask you to listen to me  
And you start giving me advice,  
You have not done what I asked.

When I ask you to listen to me  
And you begin to tell me how I should feel  
You are trampling on my feelings.

When I ask you to listen to me  
And you feel you have to do something to solve my problems,  
You have failed me, strange as that may seem.

Listen! All I ask is that you listen;  
Not talk, nor do – just hear me.  
And I can do for myself – I'm not helpless  
Maybe discouraged and faltering, but not helpless.

When you do something for me, that I can  
and need to do for myself,  
You contribute to my fear and weakness.

But when you accept as a simple fact that I do feel what I feel,  
No matter how irrational  
Then I quit trying to convince you  
And can get about the business of understanding  
What's behind this irrational feeling.

When that's clear,  
The answers are obvious and I don't need advice.  
Irrational feelings make sense when we  
Understand what's behind them.

Perhaps that's why prayer works sometimes for some people;  
Because  
God is mute, and doesn't give advice to try to 'fix' things,  
He/She just listens, and lets you work it out for yourself.

So please listen, and just hear me, and if you want to talk,  
Wait a minute for your turn,  
And I'll listen to you.

**Source:** <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/mhcarer/docs/articlelisten/pdf>

*(Lifted from October 2009 Newsletter Family Bereavement  
Support Services Royal Children's Hospital)*

## Bill of Rights for the Bereaved:

We have the right to express our grieving in our own way.

We have the right to know that grieving is slow, hard work and to move through it at our own pace.

We have the right to express our feelings about grief and to explore them.

We have the right to forgive ourselves for the things we think we "should" have done or "might" have done and realize that what we did in that moment of time was based on the information at hand and that we did the best that we could with the knowledge we had.

We have the right to be ourselves and to recognize our strengths and our limitations.

We have the right to participate actively in our mourning, to remember the past with fond memories and to allow ourselves to enjoy our lives again.

We have the right to move forward and to speak of our pain, whether that makes people uncomfortable or not.

We have the right to go back and forth in our grieving; some days making progress and other days slipping back.

We have a right to express our emotions and to have others bear witness to our story.

We have the right to believe that we will have a whole life again!

– 2006, *The Healing Power of Grief*

*Transcending the Loss of a Spouse to Life and Laughter*  
by Gloria Lintermans & Marilyn Stolzman, Ph.D., L.M.F.T.  
(Champion Press, Ltd., March 2006) ISBN: 1-932783-48-2

*Nobody has ever measured,  
not even poets,  
how much the heart can hold.*

– Zelda Fitzgerald

*The best and most beautiful things  
in this world cannot be seen  
or even heard, but must be felt  
with the heart.*

– Helen Keller

## Fathers Weep at Graves

I see them weep  
The fathers at the stones  
Taking off the brave armor  
Forced to wear in the work place  
Clearing away the debris  
With gentle fingers  
Inhaling the sorrow  
Diminished by anguish  
Their hearts desiring  
What they cannot have –  
To walk hand in hand  
With children no longer held–  
To all the fathers who leave a part  
Of their hearts at the stones  
May breezes underneath the trees of time  
Ease their pain  
As they receive healing tears  
...the gift the children give.

– Alice J. Wisler

*“For David, in memory of our son Daniel  
(August 25, 1992 – February 2, 1997)”*

## My Wish List

I wish you would not be afraid to speak my loved one’s name. They lived and are important and I need to hear their name.

If I cry or get emotional when we talk about my loved one, I wish you knew it isn’t because you have hurt me; the fact that they have died has caused my tears. If you allow me to cry, I thank you. Crying and emotional outbursts are healing.

I wish you wouldn’t let my loved one die again by removing from your home his pictures, artwork or other remembrances.

I will have emotional highs and lows, ups and downs. I wish that you wouldn’t think that if I have a good day my grief is over, or that if I have a bad day I need psychiatric counselling.

I wish you knew that the death of a child/sibling is different from other losses and must be viewed separately. It is the ultimate tragedy and I wish you wouldn’t compare it to other losses.

Being a bereaved parent isn’t contagious, so I wish you wouldn’t stay away from me.

I wish you knew all these ‘crazy’ grief reactions that I am having are in fact very normal. Depression, anger, frustration, hopelessness and the questioning of values and beliefs are to be expected following a death.

I wish you wouldn’t expect my grief to be over in six months. The first few years are going to be exceedingly traumatic for us. As with alcoholics, I will never be ‘cured’ or a ‘formally bereaved’, but for evermore be recovering from my bereavement.

I wish you understood the physical reaction to grief. I may gain weight or lose weight, sleep all the time or not at all, develop a host of illnesses or be accident prone, all of which are related to my grief.

Our loved one’s birthday, the anniversary of the death and the holidays are terrible times for us. I wish you could tell us that you are thinking of them on these days. And if we get quiet and withdrawn, just know that we are thinking about them and don’t try to coerce us into being cheerful.

I wish you wouldn’t offer to take me out for a drink or to a party, this is just a temporary crutch and the only way I can get through this grief is to experience it. I have hurt before and I can heal.

I wish that grief changes people. I am not the same person I was before my loved one died and I never will be that person again. If you keep waiting for me to ‘get back to my old self’, you will stay frustrated. I am a new creature with new thoughts, dreams, aspirations, values and beliefs. Please try to get to know the new me – maybe you’ll still like me.

– Source Unknown

## Giving grief a voice

Jude was the kind of child who took your breath away. A shock of messy blonde hair and mesmerising blue eyes: his was a crazy kind of beautiful.

When he died, two days before Christmas 2011, it was sudden, unexpected and incomprehensible. This cheeky, knockabout five-year-old, who we all thought was indestructible, was my oldest friend Fiona's boy. His death, from an undetected heart defect left a hole so enormous I couldn't believe it wasn't leading the 6 o'clock news.

Shock gave way to grief, that came in a flailing, hanging-on-by-the-fingertips blur.

As I prepared for the flight home to Scotland for the funeral, I found myself in the self-help section of a Melbourne bookshop, searching for ways to support my friend. My impotence was matched only by the abject futility of the titles I found. When bad things happen to good people, and *Beyond the broken heart: a journey through grief*. It was like trying to fight a firestorm with a watering can.

I had no idea how to talk to the bereaved. Until then, I'd mostly avoided those who'd lost loved ones. I didn't know what to say so I said nothing. In a culture that's distinctly uncomfortable with pain, this is a safe position for many people. We don't like to look that kind of loss in the eye for fear it might swallow us.

Now, under recent changes made to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – the psychiatric handbook used globally by doctors to diagnose mental illness - grief can be classified as a depressive illness after just two weeks.

Fourteen days. How has it come to this that a natural, albeit intensely painful, part of the human experience can be deemed so alien we'd rather label it as abnormal than let ourselves feel it?

Unlike some cultures - in which wailing rituals, open caskets and unbridled public displays of grief are an important part of the healing process – in our buttoned-up, western world, grieving is something to be done discretely and behind closed doors.

Silent mourning has become so normalised that psychotherapist Renate Ogilvie describes a phenomenon of "car grieving", where the sound-proofed isolation of our car is the only safe place to express our most profound emotions.

But grief isn't pretty and it's rarely quiet. It can be a skin-scratching evisceration, that rattles through every

nerve ending and rasps on each breath. Denying it a voice isn't healthy. And it's an insult to those we've lost.

When you make space for it, grief can be the grandest monument to love. The exquisite pain is a measure of our loss.

Tiptoeing around the bereaved for fear we may say the wrong thing is a natural response to a life event many of us are often too scared to contemplate. But grief needs to be spoken.

For Fiona, one of the hardest things in the aftermath of Jude's death was feeling as if he was being erased. Some people would say anything to avoid talking about him, terrified it would trigger more hurt. It had the opposite effect.

She told me: "I'm not over the death of my baby boy and I never will be, so the mention of his name doesn't remind me that he died, it lets me know that people remember that he lived."

Nearly two years on and her sense of loss remains ever present. By any measure, she will always be grieving. But she is not ill. She has simply found a way to accommodate her pain.

In December, as she prepared for the first anniversary of Jude's death and another Christmas without him, she swapped the traditional advent calendar for a journal that marked one thing each day that she was grateful for. I was, and still am, in awe of her resilience and capacity for love.

How, I wondered, does she do it? Her explanation simultaneously reassured and devastated me: "I need people not to misunderstand my sense of being okay. They shouldn't decide that I've moved on, accepted my loss or, God forbid, replaced my precious son. Instead, people should know that it's possible to choose to be okay whilst at the same time living with a broken heart."

For some people, grief may well morph into something self-destructive that requires medical support. This assistance should be made readily available. But for the majority of those who experience loss, I suspect they just need to be allowed to mourn vocally and whole-heartedly, without fear of some arbitrary time limit dictating that their pain has run its course.

I can never replace what Fiona has lost but I can promise her I will never say, "enough now." I will never tire of hearing her talk about Jude, and I will continue to remember her crazy-beautiful boy and say his name out loud for as long as I have breath in my body.

**– Jill Stark (Senior Writer with The Sunday Age)  
October 2013**

**Read more:** <http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/life/blogs/stark-naked/giving-grief-a-voice-20131015-2vjhj.html#ixzz2hw68lrvo>

*If we make our goal to live a life of compassion and unconditional love,  
then the world will indeed become a garden  
where all kinds of flowers can bloom and grow.*

– Elizabeth Kubler-Ross

*Sweet souls around us watch us still; press nearer to our side;  
into our thoughts, into our prayers, with gentle helpings glide.*

– Harriet Beecher Stowe

*We do not receive wisdom, we must discover it for ourselves after  
a journey from which no one can spare us.*

– Marcel Proust

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