

The Process of Grief

By Kelsey

If I'd been asked to describe the progression of grief a few years ago, I would have assumed it'd work through a nice orderly timeline. It would start at the loss and work through different emotions (anger, sadness, frustration, etc.) in some sort of logical order. Each emotion would be a level and once worked through, you'd move on to the next stage in the process.

I have since concluded that grief does not follow a systematic timeline. Instead, it often reminds me of a rollercoaster—up and down, to and fro, and all without any warning. You hang on so tight your fingers hurt, scream your head off, and try not to get sick on the unlucky person who's seated in front of you. You can go from being at acceptance, to anger, and then right back to just feeling depressed, and you would have felt like you'd worked through each of those already.

Grief isn't a cycle – once you've worked through something you're on to the next phase, because the feelings and struggles are always there, but it's impossible for anyone to try and deal with them all at the same time, so it comes in shifts. The process of working through grief doesn't inch along, slowly, but surely, going in the right direction. It takes quantum leaps that seem to lead anywhere but forward, but eventually, someday, comes to an end.

Some days, I wake up feeling as if the world is almost as it should be, but the reality of what I'm dealing with can hit again and leave me feeling dazed. It makes me hesitate when answering "How are you?" because I don't want to drag everyone I know along on my rollercoaster. If I cry when talking, they assume life must be "bad," but if I'm able to smile while reporting the details of life to them, then life must be "good." The struggles are always the same; they're always there. I think this is something people have a hard time grasping.

Often, it seems as if people are only able to place me in one of their mental boxes. If I'm in the "poor Kelsey box" they'll ask sympathetic questions and make sad eyes to such a sickening degree I would like to sign them up for acting lessons (if they're going to act, at least they could try looking sincere). When placed in this box, people seem to forget I'm even capable of talking about anything lighter than grief, death and the like, or would even want to do something simply for enjoyment.

On the other hand, if I'm stuck in the "life is fine box," when I mention something about my dad's health and how life is going, they'll look surprised for a moment and comment, "Oh, that's right... how is your dad anyway?" They'd forgotten anything was even happening.

I hate being in either box, because both are such horribly inaccurate representations of my life. Some of it might simply be that they can't understand what the process of working through grief looks like; they still think it follows a timeline, so they don't understand why I don't feel "better" yet, or why I haven't moved on to the next "stage." The trouble is, there aren't "stages" in that sense; just one wild ride.