

AFTERWARD

A GUIDE TO GRIEVING



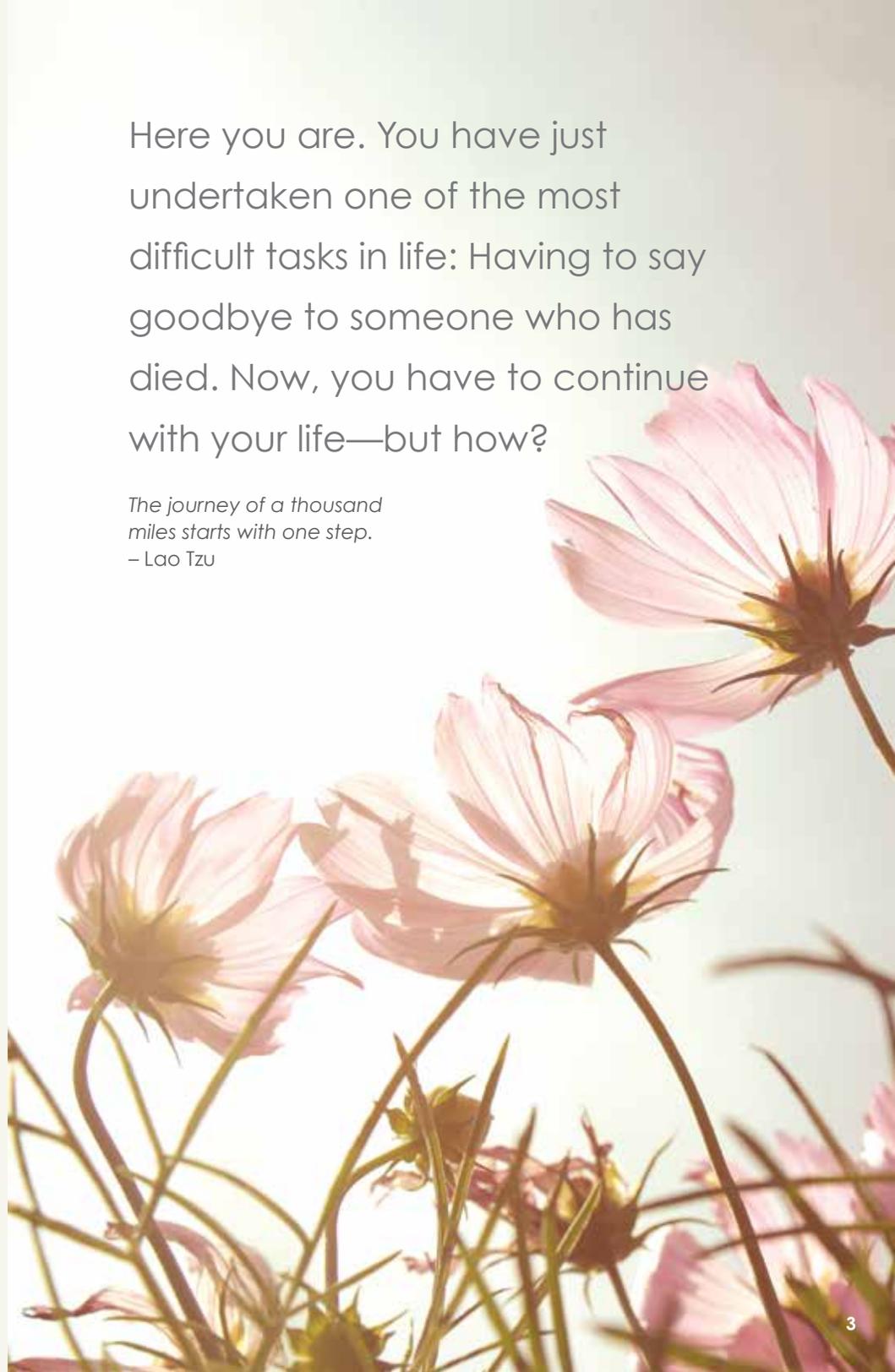
This booklet is for anyone who has lost someone.
We hope it brings understanding,
help and hope as you grieve.

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Here you are. You have just undertaken one of the most difficult tasks in life: Having to say goodbye to someone who has died. Now, you have to continue with your life—but how?

The journey of a thousand miles starts with one step.
– Lao Tzu



GRIEF HAPPENS

Grief is the natural response to loss. It effects every aspect of a person's being: mental, emotional, spiritual, social, physical and psychological.

People have described their feelings after losing someone as:

- living under water
- being punched in the gut
- unable to breathe right, think straight or move forward
- anxiety • fear • relief • guilt • sadness
- confusion • anger • loneliness • shock
- out of control
- feeling separate from the world around them, like living behind glass or under water.

THE NATURE OF GRIEF

It's natural in our Western culture to want to tidy up the process of grieving, put grief on a schedule and tell it how to behave.

Unfortunately, the process of grieving isn't tidy. We can't schedule or control grief. We can try to ignore our feelings, as some do, but grief will be waiting: around the corner, at the dinner table or at your next public speaking engagement.

At this time, the weight of your grief may seem too much to bear. You may believe you'll never feel good or whole again. It's true, grieving is hard business.

But take heart: Though we are not able to avoid or control the grief process, we can *manage it* with tools and support.



WHAT'S NORMAL?

The feelings associated with grief can come all at once or in waves, as you go about your day, or in the quiet of night. Grief is unpredictable, and every person's experience is different.

You may have good hours (or even a good day), and then wake up the next morning feeling unable to get out of bed. A fit of crying, waves of despair or other strong emotion may come over you without warning.

Grief can make you feel out of control, like you've lost the ability to function in your own life. Some people say they feel like they're going crazy.

Such intense feelings are unsettling, but they are typical of people who have experienced loss.



FEELINGS OF GRIEF

You may experience one, several or all of the following responses to loss (or perhaps none at all). Please note: These are not stages of grief; nor are they listed in any particular order. Instead, they are explained here to help you understand your grief experience and how to care for yourself.

SHOCK, DISBELIEF & DENIAL

Losing someone is traumatic. You may feel numb or disconnected from the situation, much like a person going into shock after a serious injury. You may feel unable to wrap your mind around or acknowledge your loss. Such feelings are natural, especially in the days, weeks and initial months following a loss.

Characteristics may include: Not being able to “take in” conversation or information. Feeling numb or non-emotional. Trying to carry on with life as usual.

You can: Treat yourself gently, allowing time to process the reality of your loss. In time, give yourself short periods to think about the person, to reflect and to experience the feelings that eventually will surface.

CONFUSION & DISORGANIZATION

Following loss, you may feel foggy about time, people and situations, including the time preceding the death of your loved one. It may seem impossible to manage or remember daily tasks. Ways you've coped in the past may not work for you at this time.

Characteristics may include: Difficulty communicating, concentrating or following through with projects. Feeling scattered and unable to organize thoughts. Feeling as if you're living inside a bubble.

You can: Try not to make any big decisions or take on tasks that can wait. Communicate with trusted friends and family about how you are feeling and ask for help, if you are comfortable doing so. Keep a pad of paper or an electronic device handy to record lists and make notes. Perhaps most important, be patient with yourself.

RELIEF

Sometimes after a person dies, especially after a prolonged or difficult illness, people feel a sense of relief: Relief that the person who died is no longer suffering. Relief that caregiving has ceased. Relief that a loved one, especially an older person who has had a compromised quality of life, is free.

Relief can feel like a wrong response after your loved one has died, but it's not. It is an honest (and acceptable) reaction to a complex situation.

You can: Allow yourself the space to breathe and rest. Take walks, and take deep breaths. Get out of the house, get a massage, eat good food and, if possible, sleep. Try to avoid feelings of guilt, instead reminding yourself you did the best you could in a difficult situation.

GUILT

People may feel guilt for a number of reasons following a loved one's death. They may wonder: *Did I do enough? Did I do the right things? Why am I still here while my loved one is gone?* They may dwell on past situations or conversations that they wish they could change.

Characteristics may include: Uncertainty. Waves of self-doubt or "beating oneself up." Unhappiness or dwelling on negative thoughts.

You can: Try to let go of feelings of guilt. While understandable, carrying guilt is unproductive and can become destructive. Acknowledge these feelings, perhaps writing them down or even asking for forgiveness for things in the past that you wish had been different. Reflect on all the ways you cared and were there for your loved one, and extend forgiveness to yourself.

ANGER

How could you have left me? God, how could you have taken this person away? Why couldn't the doctors do more? It's not fair.

You may feel deep frustration, devastation or rage, even exploding in anger toward a higher power, the universe or people around you. You may feel (or people may tell you) that you shouldn't be angry, that it's not right. In fact, strong feelings go hand-in-hand with loss. What's important is how you express them.

Characteristics may include: Outbursts or feelings of rage that lead to physical symptoms (i.e. racing heart, tight chest or headaches). Inability to feel calm or in control.

You can: Tell yourself these feelings are ok, as long as you are not hurting yourself or people around you. Find ways that are both honest and constructive to express them. Talk about your feelings with people you trust, go to the gym or challenge yourself with a physical task. If feelings of anger continue, or you feel you can't gain control, seek the help of a professional counselor.

ANXIETY, PANIC & FEAR

Death is a part of life, yet it feels anything but natural when you lose someone, no matter what age or circumstance. Losing someone is an event we can't control, often leaving us feeling at loose ends, anxious or afraid. Such feelings are typical following loss and should ease over time.

Characteristics may include: Free floating anxiety or panic attacks. Feelings of fear, agitation or sleeplessness. Having a persistent lump in your throat or feeling like it's literally hard to swallow. Having a desire to stay home to avoid interacting with people or the outside world. Racing thoughts, especially at night.

You can: Find someone to talk with about your feelings, a trustworthy friend, family member or professional counselor. Not expressing them may make feelings stronger and more difficult to manage. Try taking deep breaths. Physical activity can help, such as walking, riding a bike or yoga. Being out in nature or with a pet is proven to reduce anxiety. Consider massage, hot springs or other healthy, relaxing activities to ease your feelings.

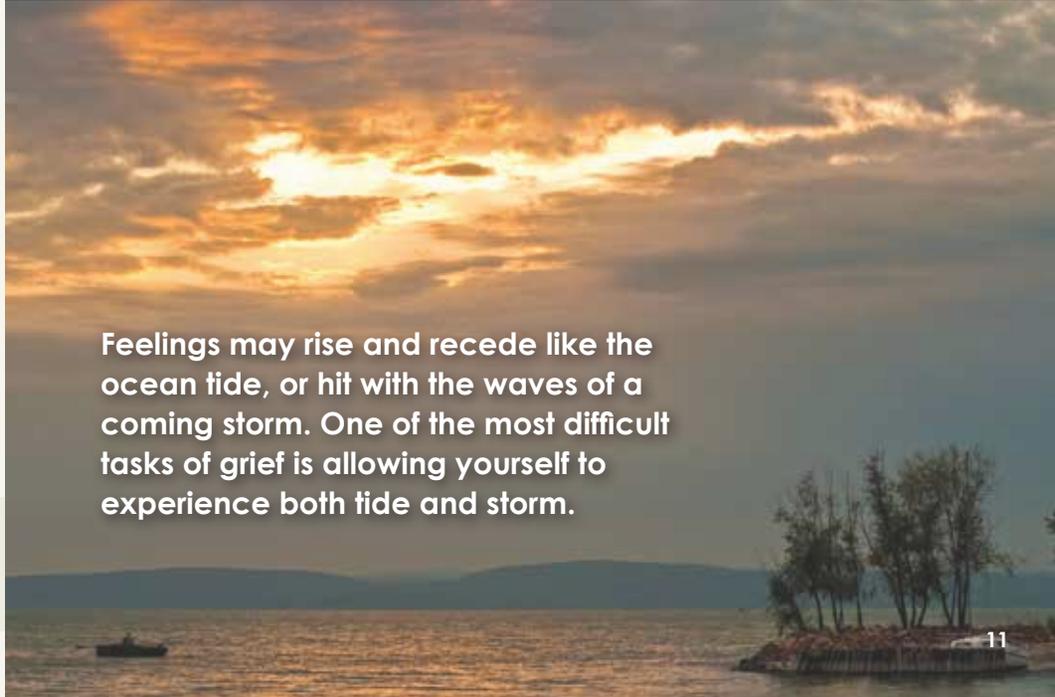
No one ever told me that grief could feel so much like fear. — C.S. Lewis, from "A Grief Observed"

SADNESS & LONGING

Sadness is the emotion most often associated with grief. Yet the depth of this feeling often surprises people, taking the form of an ache or profound longing: for the person, a shared life or what might have been.

Characteristics may include: Crying (sometimes feeling unable to stop). Physical ache in the pit of the stomach. Feeling sluggish, hopeless or having the sense that you'll never be happy again.

You can: Experience these feelings as a part of mourning your loss and express them. Cry. Scream. Talk about the person you've lost. Take time to grieve and to remember your loved one. If feelings of hopelessness, helplessness or deep sadness don't improve over time, this may be a sign of depression. In this case, it is important to consult a physician.



Feelings may rise and recede like the ocean tide, or hit with the waves of a coming storm. One of the most difficult tasks of grief is allowing yourself to experience both tide and storm.

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS OF GRIEF

People often are surprised that grief has physical effects, which may include:

- Difficulty sleeping (or sleeping too much)
- Loss of appetite
- Overeating
- Aches or pains
- Low energy
- Disorientation or difficulty concentrating
- Forgetfulness
- Headaches, jaw clenching or feeling short of breath.

These symptoms generally ease with time.

**There is sacredness in tears.
They are not the mark of
weakness, but of power.
They speak more eloquently
than ten thousand tongues.
They are messengers of
overwhelming grief...and
unspeakable love.**

— Washington Irving



Here are some things you can do to help manage your grief:

- Be patient with yourself, limiting your “to do” list.
- Take one minute, one hour, one day at a time.
- See your doctor for a physical to discuss how you're doing and to have a plan to stay healthy. Those who have cared for a loved one often don't care for themselves. Be honest about what you're experiencing.
- Express your feelings to a person in your life who is supportive.
- Keep a normal routine as best possible.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Get enough rest. If you have ongoing insomnia or fitful sleep, talk to a physician or counselor for help.
- Exercise—a walk, run, yoga, or biking (even 20 minutes a day) can help ease stress.
- Remember to breathe, taking times throughout the day to take deep, slow breaths, especially before bed.
- Eat good food, including protein (eggs, fish, chicken, Greek yogurt), trying smaller meals more often.
- Avoid masking your pain through alcohol, drugs, overeating or other potentially harmful habits. Please seek help if you are having difficulty in these areas.
- Postpone big decisions, or ask for help from a person you trust.

Allow yourself to cry, as tears help relieve stress, lower blood pressure and promote healing. Remember, grief is not a mark of weakness, but of being human.

ALLOW YOURSELF A BREAK FROM GRIEF

Some people feel guilt over moments of enjoyment. Life, even after loss, is a mix of humor and sadness, work and rest, pleasure and tears. It is okay in the midst of grief to laugh and to let joy into your world as you find it. Savor such moments. Like a stream of sunlight through a storm-darkened sky, these moments are good for your soul.

Experiencing such breaks in grief doesn't mean you've forgotten the person you've lost. Grieving needs to have some release; grief with no break can lead to physical symptoms or clinical depression, compounding an already difficult task.

You can:

Go to a movie, read a book, go shopping, play golf, head out to dinner, get a massage or treat yourself to something you enjoy or brings you comfort.

Be glad of life because it gives you the chance to love and to work and to play and to look up at the stars.

— Henry Van Dyke

WHEN DO I SEEK HELP?

People who are grieving often find it helpful to turn outward for help, which might include reading books, speaking with a counselor or attending a support group.

Grief counseling provides a quiet opportunity for people to talk about their thoughts, feelings and questions with someone other than (or in addition to) a family member. A counselor can help you understand your grief and find ways to manage it.

Support groups or workshops provide a forum for working through grief. People may find that being on common ground with others who are grieving helps them make sense of their own experience.

During the first weeks and months after losing someone, feelings can be intense. Coping techniques you've used in the past may not work. You may find it difficult (or impossible) to function in your everyday life. This is expected.

However, if you find yourself falling into unhealthy patterns of behavior or thought, or if high intensity feelings continue over time, it's important to seek professional help. Such thought or behavior may include:

- extreme isolation
- keeping constantly busy to avoid feeling
- depression • suicidal thoughts
- over- or under-eating
- using drugs or alcohol to cope.

You can always call the Agape support team as your first step in reaching out: 720.482.1988.

Even as the heart is breaking, the pieces begin to inch back. Even though the little things bring sobs up to your throat, and confusion has crushed any sense of normalcy in your life, something in you is plotting survival.

— Molly Fumia, "Safe Passage: Words to Help the Grieving"

FAMILY, FRIENDS & SOCIAL LIFE

Most people mean well. This is a thought to keep in the back of your mind when you hear such things as: "He is in a better place," "Her suffering is over," or the ludicrous pronouncement that it's time to "get over it," or "move on" with your life (as if this were possible).

You can:

Seek out positive people in your life who will support you, wherever you are in your grief. Try not to let others rush you through your grief or tell you how, when, where and for how long you should grieve.

It is okay (and often helpful) to seek support outside of your friends and family network, where you can find understanding and the freedom to be open about your feelings.

The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing... not healing, not curing... that is a friend who cares.

— Henri Nouwen



GRIEF UNDER PRESSURE

People who are grieving often report that they feel pressured by well-meaning family, friends or others to do things they may not be ready to do. This includes: going through your loved one's belongings, getting back to work, engaging in social life (parties, holiday celebrations, etc.) or making big changes, such as putting a house up for sale.

Remember, grief is individual, and every person proceeds in his or her own way and time.

You can:

Allow yourself the time and space you need. Communicate to people that you're not ready to (fill in the blank). Make this (I'm not ready to . . .) your one-line statement, and avoid energy-draining discussion. If immediate action is a legitimate requirement and you feel unsure, seek help from a person you trust.

We are here for you. Please don't hesitate to call our support team at 720.482.1988.

DEATH & SPIRITUAL LIFE

The loss of someone you love can shake you to the core, even raising deep questions and unexpected feelings about God, a higher power or the purpose and meaning of life.

It is not uncommon to face doubt, anger or crisis of faith when we experience loss.

If you're a person of faith, you may find it helpful to lean on your faith: the words, music, ritual and community. Attending a place of worship can elicit strong emotion, particularly following loss, and you may have attended with your loved one. It may be difficult, especially at first, but taking part can serve as a pathway to healing.

People who are grieving have also found great solace in nature. The natural world, being outdoors in the mountains, trees, near water or in a garden, can feel supportive and calming. Many feel a connection to a creator or higher power more in the midst of nature than anywhere else. Being in nature, even a short time each day, has been shown to reduce stress and improve well-being.

Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished.

— Lao Tzu

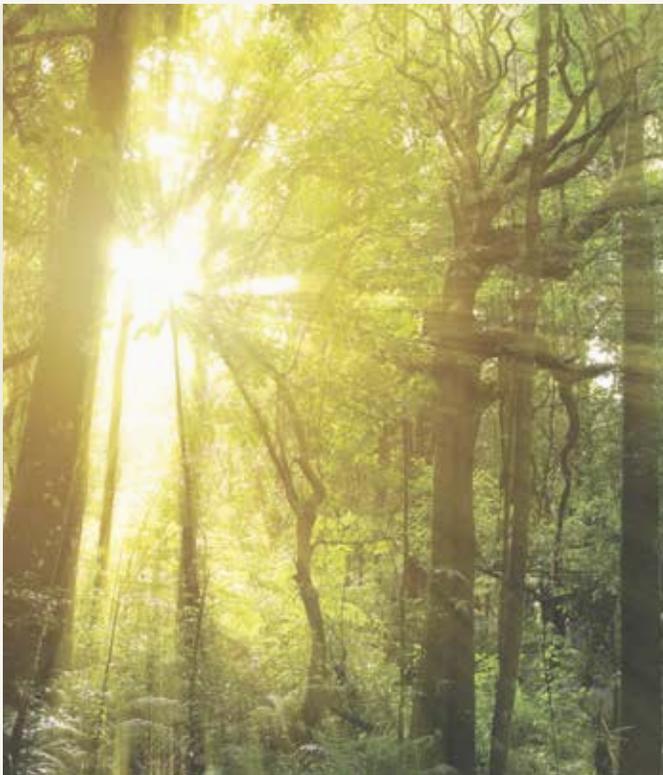
You can:

Express your emotion with your faith community, to the extent you feel comfortable. Avoid putting on a “happy face” to ease others around you. Allow others to support you. As you are able, allow your belief to sustain you, while giving yourself the chance to explore thoughts or questions you may have. Seeking answers can bring understanding, deepen your faith and help you heal.

Make an effort to get outside. Hiking, walking or soaking in hot springs can provide stress relief and play an active part of your grief experience. Allow sun, sky, rolling stream or gentle breeze to bring healing to your spirit.

Faith is the strength by which a shattered world shall emerge into the light.

— Helen Keller



REMEMBERING

It is important to remember the person who's died. Continue to display pictures. Allow your loved one into your thoughts. Speak his or her name when talking with others. It's even healthy to have conversations with your loved one, to express your thoughts and feelings.

Here are a few other tangible ways to remember:

- Write. Record your thoughts, memories and stories as they come to you
- Create a photo album, gathering pictures and telling each one's story.
- Make a memory jar with your family and friends. Ask each to write a few memories, general or around a specific occasion. Place them into a jar and read them aloud when the time seems right.
- Attend services of remembrance or other events that allow you to commemorate your loved one. Agape holds two services each year.
- Mark anniversaries by doing something meaningful to you, even small.
- Paint a picture, make a music play list, create a collage (or anything expressive) to commemorate your loved one or a part of the life you shared.

BREAKING THROUGH

**Grief is in two parts. The first is loss.
The second is the remaking of life.**

— Anne Roiphe

Every person's journey through grief is distinct. We can recognize landmarks, but no one has the official guidebook.

Each of us has to make the journey with the best tools we can get our hands on. To that end, we encourage you to seek the support you need.

Developing a new self-identity is one of the most difficult aspects of the grief journey. Make no mistake: This does not mean letting go of or breaking bonds with the person you've lost. Instead, it marks the process of relocating the person into your life following loss, remaking your life in the Afterward.

How in the world can I do this?

This process is difficult because it is directly related to experiencing your grief: connecting with the loss, feeling the emotions, actively remembering and incorporating all the feelings and loss into yourself. It takes guts. It takes effort. And it takes time.

Grief is powerful. It effects and changes us in ways we often couldn't have anticipated. It may be hard to imagine now, but...

You will heal and you will rebuild yourself around the loss you have suffered. You will be whole again but you will never be the same. Nor should you be the same nor would you want to.

— Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler



You will lose someone you can't live without, and your heart will be badly broken, and the bad news is that you never completely get over the loss of your beloved. But this is also the good news. They live forever in your broken heart that doesn't seal back up. And you come through. It's like having a broken leg that never heals perfectly—that still hurts when the weather gets cold, but you learn to dance with the limp.

— Writer Anne Lamott



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