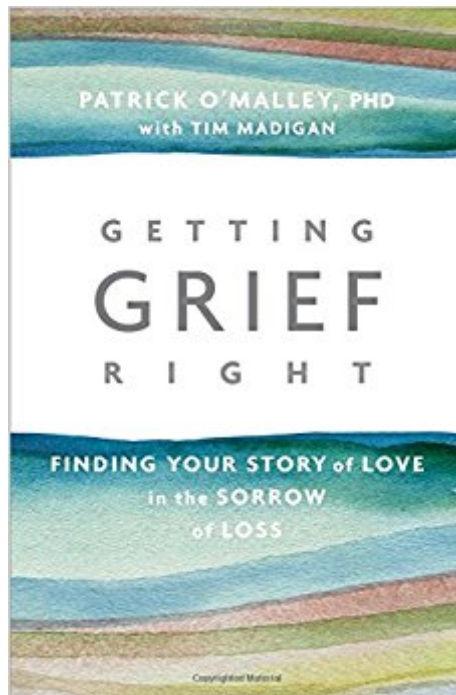




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Getting Grief Right: Finding Your Story Of Love In The Sorrow Of Loss



Synopsis

When the New York Times ran Patrick O'Malley's story about the loss of his infant son and how his inability to "move on" challenged everything he was taught as a psychotherapist it inspired an unprecedented flood of gratitude from readers. What he shared was a truth that many have felt but rarely acknowledged by the professionals they turn to: that our grief is not a mental illness to be cured, but part of the abiding connection with the one we've lost. Illuminated by O'Malley's own story and those of many clients that he's supported, readers learn how the familiar "stages of grief" too often mislabel our sorrow as a disorder, press us to "get over it," and amplify our suffering with shame and guilt when we do not achieve "closure" in due course. "Sadness, regret, confusion, yearning—all the experiences of grief—are a part of the narrative of love," reflects O'Malley. Here, with uncommon sensitivity and support, he invites us to explore grief not as a process of recovery, but as the ongoing narrative of our relationship with the one we've lost to be fully felt, told, and woven into our lives. For those in bereavement and anyone supporting those who are, *Getting Grief Right* offers an uncommonly empathetic guide to opening to our sorrow as the full expression of our love.

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Customer Reviews

"O'Malley gives us the tools to tell the story of the deceased: favorite memories, when he or she was happiest and saddest, how you learned about the death, and so forth. Different kinds of

loss bring different stories, and different kinds of pain. Telling the story of how you loved and how you lost gives shape and meaning to what first seems to be a meaningless, uncontrollable event."

•The New York Times Book Review

"There is no right way to navigate the mysterious and holy landscape of grief. And there is no wrong way. With profound compassion and juicy storytelling, Patrick O'Malley offers those of us whose lives have been shattered by loss permission to mourn our loved ones with all our hearts and find our own transformational stories in the crucible of our authentic life experiences."

• Mirabai Starr, author of *Caravan of No Despair: A Memoir of Loss and Transformation*; translator of *Dark Night of the Soul* (St. John of the Cross)

"Getting Grief Right is a compassionate, wise, and practical guide that gives space for our grief to tell its own story and be as it is. A very valuable, up-to-date resource for anyone wanting to consciously navigate this challenging inner landscape."

• John J. Prendergast, PhD, author of *In Touch: How to Tune In to the Inner Guidance of Your Body and Trust Yourself*; psychotherapist; adjunct professor of psychology (retired), California Institute of Integral Studies

"Nearly four decades ago, Patrick O'Malley and his wife Nancy experienced every parent's nightmare: the death of their infant son. Over the years since, O'Malley has allowed his grief to shape not only his heart but also his mind, and in this book he offers profound wisdom about the texture of grief. Avoiding clichés and shattering the idea that grief marches through some predictable and lock-step set of stages, O'Malley instead understands that every experience of grief is personal and unique and that every griever has a story worth telling. This book is immensely valuable, both for those who grieve and for those who want to offer them true consolation."

• Thomas G. Long, coauthor of *The Good Funeral: Death, Grief, and the Community of Care*

"Getting Grief Right offers both individual mourners and grief groups a restorative approach to handling grief while preserving memories of our loved ones. Asserting that grief is embedded in the everyday experience of being human, O'Malley and Madigan argue for a re-framing of grief as something that mourners recognize and accommodate, rather than a stage to be worked beyond. Through an effective formula based on years of both personal and professional experience, the authors offer a template for the reader's grief journey that works in both private and group settings. I highly recommend the book's study guide for anyone interested in honoring their own grief journey or eager to help others who have recently experienced loss. This book is an ideal companion for grief workshops, and it is sure to become an integral tool in learning to live with loss."

• Candi Cann, PhD, associate professor of religion at Baylor University and author of *Virtual Afterlives: Grieving the Dead in the Twenty-First Century*

"With Getting

Grief Right, by Patrick O'Malley touches an issue dear to my heart and mind: the importance of telling the truth about loss, which is really the truth about love. Through his personal experience and the stories of others, he normalizes grief, offering it back to the griever to explore and define their own experience within the wide frame of health and wellness.

—Megan Devine, teacher, speaker, psychotherapist, and author of *It's OK That You're Not OK: Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture That Doesn't Understand*

“Patrick O'Malley has created a subtle, honest, and delicate understanding of living a life of grief. *Getting Grief Right* is not a list of stages or rules. It does not pretend to know about the grief of others. Because O'Malley, a psychotherapist, himself suffered the inconsolable loss of the death of his child, he can accompany others through their grieving. His book becomes a warm, accepting presence, telling stories and inviting readers to tell their own. Grieving does not end, O'Malley softly notes, but the stories that we tell about those we have lost turn the grief right back into the love from which it springs.

—Rita Charon, MD, PhD, professor of medicine at Columbia University Medical Center; executive director, Program in Narrative Medicine

“In *Getting Grief Right*, O'Malley dispels the myth that we'll get over a death, achieve closure, and move on with our lives grief-free. O'Malley validates my experience of ministering for forty-five years to grieving people: they want to, they need to, talk about and remember their loved ones who died. He helps us understand what is unique about each person's grief story, and how our grief story is our therapy.

—Fr. Charles Calabrese, chaplain, Texas Health Harris Methodist Hospital Fort Worth

“*Getting Grief Right* should be required reading for all those entering the counseling profession, as well as those of us who mourn the death of a loved one. Dr. Patrick O'Malley is a very wise, compassionate storyteller. He gives us reassurance and permission to embrace our own grief journey by removing the fear that we are not grieving correctly. He helps us understand that to mourn and grieve is as natural as breathing. We ask, “How long will it take?” Dr. O'Malley says, “How deeply did you love?” This book is a masterpiece that will touch your heart and soul with healing powers.

—Peggy Bohme, cofounder of The WARM Place Grief Support Center for Children in Fort Worth, Texas

“Patrick O'Malley is a rare and refreshing voice in the world of grief literacy. This wonderful book belongs in the hands and hearts of every grieving person.

—Ken Druck, PhD, author of *The Real Rules of Life: Balancing Life's Terms with Your Own*

PhD Patrick O'Malley Patrick O'Malley, PHD, has been providing grief counseling and education to clients and colleagues for over 35 years. For more, visit drpatrickomalley.com. Tim Madigan Tim Madigan, an award-winning journalist, is the author of *The Burning: Massacre, Destruction, and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (St. Martin's Press, 2003) and *I'm Proud of You: My Friendship with Fred Rogers* (Gotham/Penguin, 2006). For more, visit timmadigan.net.

Helpful

Pretty basic, and his assumptions are way out of date.

"The writer Anne Lamott says it beautifully: '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.' It's not an exaggeration to say that, over time, the nature of successful grieving was redefined in my office by both my clients and me. It wasn't getting over loss; it was learning to live with it, and to use the grief narrative as a way to preserve a bond with the one who died." "This book will not help you 'get over' your grief, but will help you experience your sorrow in its most pure form." Patrick O'Malley knows a thing or two about loss: not only is he a therapist who specializes in bereavement counseling, but he lost his first-born son, Ryan, before they'd even celebrated his first birthday. As a young husband, new father, and practicing psychotherapist, O'Malley followed the advice of his colleagues and indeed, the same advice he'd given to countless grieving patients and tried to "get over" Ryan's death. However, as the prescribed time frame for grieving came and went, O'Malley gradually began to question the wisdom and efficacy of stage-based models of bereavement, perhaps best exemplified by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's infamous five stages of grief. (Say it with me: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and

Acceptance.) After much soul searching and years of experience, Malley embraced a much kinder and more compassionate framework: one that celebrates the patient's unique relationship to the deceased; recognizes that we all grieve in our own way, that there is no "one size fits all" model of grief; and uses storytelling to craft a cohesive grief narrative. In this way, grief is not something you "work through" and leave behind you; rather, to love is to grieve, and grieving is one way to keep your loved one alive in your memories. Storytelling – whether through journaling, videotaped recollections, or something else – is a powerful way to do this. GETTING GRIEF RIGHT consists of three key elements. First, Malley briefly explores the history of stage-based models of grief. He then shares the story of his own loss, and in so doing, he illustrates how profoundly his professional wisdom failed him in his greatest time of need. Using his own experiences, as well as those of his patients, as a jumping-off point, Malley explores this new approach to dealing with grief. I picked up this book because I'm having a spectacularly bad decade. In just three and a half years, I lost four dogs, a grandmother, and my husband. This last was what's called a "traumatic loss" due to an "interruptive death" – my husband died suddenly and unexpectedly of a heart attack. He was only 41 years old. Anyway, that was six months ago, and I've been having a hard time dealing; some things have only gotten worse with time. GETTING GRIEF RIGHT sounded like something I needed to read, and the idea of storytelling in particular appealed to me. Malley spends quite a bit of time assuring his readers that there's nothing wrong with them; that only some people pass through the five stages of grief; that these models are questionable at best; and that most people never truly "get over" a loss, and that's okay – if you loved someone, why shouldn't their absence always hurt, if just a little? (The trick is getting to a place where the memories are more likely to warm your heart than break it, imho, but the dance will always be a delicate and shifting one.) I can see how this advice could prove invaluable to those who do feel "broken" by their inability to reach acceptance, or peace, or whatever. However, I already thought of the Kbler-Ross model more as pop culture fodder than a hard and fast rule, so it felt a little redundant on my end. But grain of salt; your needs may differ from mine, and that's okay too! For me, the real value is in the storytelling. This is an aspect of grieving that I was already hip to; anyone who reads my blog on the regular can get a glimpse of

this in the ridiculously long tributes I wrote to Ralphie and Kaylee after they passed, or in the weekly progress reports I gave as I preemptively grieved Peedee's death from lung cancer. For those who don't know what to say, O'Malley gives a rather detailed list of prompts, encouraging his readers to separate their stories of loss into three chapters: the beginning (your life with your loved one before), the middle (his or her death), and the after (and all the messy, ugly feelings this entails). It's an excellent starting point, though I'd encourage people to go deeper or get more creative, for example, by incorporating poems, song lyrics, ephemera, multimedia. Whatever you feel comfortable with, and best expresses your unique story. While reading GETTING GRIEF RIGHT, I was often reminded of a Salon article, written by Jill Filipovic, which I quoted in one of my storytelling projects and has never really left me: "Let me tell you about her" allows the grieving person to explain, in the midst of a familiar ritual, why their loved one was particularly special. The impulse to explain how a person was can feel incredibly urgent in the immediate wake of that person's death. The telling of stories isn't just a way to make up for the fact that the dead person can no longer make their own stories; the telling solidifies those things in the memory of the teller, making real again and again the fact that though the person is gone, you'll remember them. "There's a fear behind that, too: What happens when I start to forget?" "To stave off the forgetting, we memorialize. We write funeral announcements and obituaries and headstones. We visit graves. And now, we make Facebook pages, we write blog posts and we tweet. The urgency in 'telling you about her' spills over into the Internet and onto social media, and it seems that to many people in pain, nothing feels more natural. Yet looking in, it can feel unseemly." GETTING GRIEF RIGHT is an invitation to "tell me about her," free of judgment or fear, no matter how long it's been since she last set foot on this earth. You may choose to share your story with others, as O'Malley recommends in some situations; or you may not. The important thing is that it exists for you: it is an outlet for your sadness, tangible evidence of your love, and a continuation of your loved one's memory. As long as you tell the world even if it's just shouting into the void about her, a part of her lives on. Definitely recommended for those struggling with grief, particularly those whose friends and family members have "moved on" (e.g., by withdrawing their support) and expect you to do the same. Why just four stars? The book is co-written by O'Malley and Tim Madigan; consequently, there's

some weird, referring-to-oneself-in-the-third-person narration going on. Granted, I read an early copy, and this could be cleaned up in the final version. That said, this ARC had more errors than unusual.** Full disclosure: I received a free electronic ARC for review through NetGalley. **

Having read Tim Madigan's book on Mr. Rogers and being aware of Patrick O'Malley as a preeminent grief counselor, I was eager to buy this book. It reads easily for the layman and, yet has enough depth to be used at the graduate level for counselors and clergy and others in the helping profession. Like all good books, this is a story. A poignant and touching story of the loss of Ryan, the O'Malley's young son. Connecting his personal story with dated and unhelpful grief theories makes this an interesting and thoughtful read. I particularly enjoyed how they weaved wisdom and love from Mr. Rogers and Henri Nouwen into this book, providing light into the darkness of grief and loss. Getting Grief Right also includes a study guide for groups and individuals. Not only am I giving this book 5 stars, I am buying additional copies for colleagues and clients.

I was given this book by my mother because of a recent loss in our family. It was especially intriguing because the author's loss is so similar to ours. My husband and I lost our third son to SIDS at 5 months old earlier this year. We have gone to some child loss support groups and are seeing a counselor but this book has been a tremendous comfort. My husband and I talk a lot about feeling completely out of sorts in our lives now; we have a hard time articulating the feeling and frankly are anxious about it. After reading this book I know that that's ok and the reason we'll always feel that way is because we lost a son that we loved so much and we lost the future we had planned with him. This isn't a feeling that will go away, there is no closure, we will always be sad because he is gone and that's ok. Talking about him, telling his story, it's important. We don't want him to be forgotten. I'm never going to be who I was before, which scares me less now. Wish I could have read this years ago so I understood grief better. But then again why would I have, such a loss would never happen to me right....right? Such a good book.

Finally someone writes a book about helping you in your time of grief that actually lets you know that the depth of grief is dependent on the depth of love and connection you had with that person. It's not about passing through stages, it's not about moving on. It's about telling your story of love and loss. It's about knowing that love can and will live on in you. It's about keeping your love alive. And that it's ok to do that. It's also about others being able and willing to hear that story and not be uncomfortable with that hearing... Thank you so much Patrick O'Malley and Tim Madigan May our

love live on.

good book. sad that i need it. we've suffered a great loss and reading helps a little.

This Should be essential reading. Chapter 12 in particular is something I wish I could mandate for all human beings.

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