

Opening Reflection

This is the hour of memory, and this is our house of comfort.

Wounded by loss, we risk retreating from life; but this hour, this space, now gathers us in.

Into this place we bring stories and prayers, unanswered questions, tears that need to be shed.

Lives recollected and carried within, moments of courage and laughter, frailty and failing, pain and renewal.

This day embraces them all; this place embraces us all.

Now the heart opens in sorrow, for we are time's subjects, and all that we love we must lose.

So let us hold fast to the love that remains, and cherish the light of the sun.

Today all of us walk the mourner's path; together may we find strength to live on.

Bright Mariner

Had I known that you were going
I could have given you,
At least, good speed;
But you slipped away so suddenly
That I was left standing on the shore
Watching into space,
Not knowing that you would never come
back
Till I felt the waters of the incoming tide
Cold about my heart.

I do not ask for you again.
I know the sea you sail does not touch these
shores.
I only look for a distant "all hail," like the
white crest of a wave against the horizon,
Or a signal light flashing once, sharp against
the sky.

Sail on, my bright sturdy mariner!
Let out a full sheet to your new winds,
Taste the clear spray of your new waters.
You were made for flight and swiftness
And eternal freedom.

Nothing shall weigh you down
Or call you back to the sweet earth,
Or the shape we knew,
Or the place that held you immeasurably
dear.

I have cut the anchor chain that bound you
to me,
And the great strength of my love,
And the heavy ache of my loneliness,
Which might bear upon you and hold you
back,
I have fashioned into a shining silken fabric,
To be the highest and strongest of your new
sails.

--- Katherine Garrison Chapin

Last Night

The light snow started late last night and continued all night long while I slept and could hear it occasionally enter my sleep, where I dreamed my brother was alive again and possessing the beauty of youth, aware that he would be leaving again shortly and that is the lesson of the snow falling and of the seeds of death that are in everything that is born: we are here for a moment of a story that is longer than all of us and few of us remember, the wind is blowing out of someplace we don't know, and each moment contains rhythms within rhythms, and if you discover some old piece of your own writing, or an old photograph, you may not remember that it was you and even if it was once you, it's not you now, not this moment that the synapses fire and your hands move to cover your face in a gesture of grief and remembrance.

--- **Stuart Kestenbaum**

The Death of a Parent

Move to the front of the line a voice says, and suddenly there is nobody left standing between you and the world, to take the first blows on their shoulders. Where part one ends, and part two begins, and there is no part three. The slate is wiped not clean but like a canvas painted over in white so that a whole new landscape must be started, bits of the old still showing underneath -- those colors of sadness lend to a certain hour of evening. Now the line of light at the horizon is the hinge between earth and heaven, only visible a few moments as the sun drops its rusted padlock into place.

--- **Linda Pastan**

The Moring Minyan

One morning shortly after my mother died, a hesitant tap on the shoulder stopped me as I left the synagogue where I had just finished saying the Mourner's Kaddish. I turned to face a fellow morning-service "regular" -- a tall, gray-haired gentleman with a football player's thick build. "I don't mean to be presumptuous," he said in a soft voice. "I know you're very sad right now. But I wanted to tell you that I went through that too, when my father died several years ago. And here's the thing: Believe it or not, I am as close to my father now as when he was alive! Maybe even closer, because I have come to understand him better. He is inside me; I hear his voice. We are still that close." Then he smiled and waved goodbye, leaving me to ponder words that I began to understand only years later. What he meant, I think, was that our dead inhabit us like ghosts. The trick, as he knew then and I have learned since, is to befriend them rather than have them haunt us. They will greet us on sad anniversaries as well as in joy. We will imagine a deceased parent's response to her grandchild's arrival; or we will call back from memory the words or actions of the one person to whom we would have turned were he or she still there. And eventually, when we hear that voice again, it will bring not just pain but comfort and resolution.

---**Diane Cole**

“The Five Stages of Grief”

The night I lost you
someone pointed me towards
the Five Stages of Grief
Go that way, they said,
it’s easy, like learning to climb
stairs after the amputation.
And so I climbed.

Denial was first.

I sat down at breakfast
carefully setting the table
for two. I passed you the toast—
you sat there. I passed
you the paper—you hid
behind it.

Anger seemed more familiar.

I burned the toast, snatched
the paper and read the headlines myself.
But they mentioned your departure,
and so I moved on to

Bargaining. What could I exchange
for you? The silence
after storms? My typing fingers?
Before I could decide, **Depression**
came puffing up, a poor relation
its suitcase tied together
with string. In the suitcase
were bandages for the eyes
and bottles of sleep. I slid
all the way down the stairs
feeling nothing.

And all the time **Hope**

flashed on and off
in defective neon.
Hope was a signpost pointing
straight in the air.
Hope was my uncle’s middle name,
he died of it.
After a year I am still climbing, though my
feet slip
on your stone face.
The treelined
has long since disappeared;
green is a color
I have forgotten.
But now I see what I am climbing
towards: **Acceptance**
written in capital letters,
a special headline:

Acceptance

its name is in lights.
I struggle on,
waving and shouting.
Below, my whole life spreads its surf,
all the landscapes I’ve ever known
or dreamed of. Below
a fish jumps: the pulse
in your neck.

Acceptance. I finally
reach it.
But something is wrong.
Grief is a circular staircase.
I have lost you.

--- Linda Pastan

Epitaph

When I die give what's left of me away to children and old men who wait to die. And if you need to cry, cry for your brother walking the street beside you. And when you need me, put your arm around anyone. And give them what you need to give to me. I want to leave you something, Something better than words or sounds. Look for me in the people I've known or loved. And if you cannot give me away, at least let me live in your eyes and not in your mind. You can love me best by letting hands touch hands, and letting go of children that need to be free. Love doesn't die, people do. So, when all that's left of me is love, Give me away.

---Merrit Malloy

After Life

I do have an ongoing relationship with the dead, and I do think about the afterlife - my afterlife, that is - after someone I know dies: what happens to me afterwards, in my life.

Some deaths come too soon; some deaths are unexpected; some deaths we think we are prepared for, but really, we are rarely ready: we don't usually know when a conversation is the last conversation, with so much that may be left unsaid, unresolved.

So, in this afterlife of mine I am still in relationship with people who have died. I miss them, I talk to them in my mind, I ask them questions about our relationship that I wasn't ready to ask them when they were still alive. I show off my accomplishments, and wish they could witness them; and yes, I still have some of the same old arguments, still trying to prove my point of view. What helps me go forward? How do I resolve these lingering feelings?

Here is what makes the *Yom Kippur Yizkor* so special - this forgiveness prayer devoted exclusively to those no longer with us, that comes late in the afternoon when we are tired, hungry, vulnerable, and open. During this *Yizkor* I am given the opportunity to forgive myself for cutting off that last phone conversation with my father - I was always in a hurry; he always wanted to chat longer; and then he died. It's during this *Yizkor* that I have the opportunity to forgive my mother for her harsh ways; to let go of being angry - for my sake in this world, if not for her sake in the world-to-come.

For this *Yizkor* to feel honest and meaningful, I don't want to sentimentalize those relationships. I don't just want to remember the ideals and gifts they may or may not have passed down. I want to remember those relationships exactly as they were, and then be able to forgive myself and them for our failings, for what we never got a chance to repair or finish.

---Cantor Linda Hirschhorn