

Helping Someone in Grief

17 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW



Anne Peterson

Helping Someone in Grief

17 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW

Anne Peterson

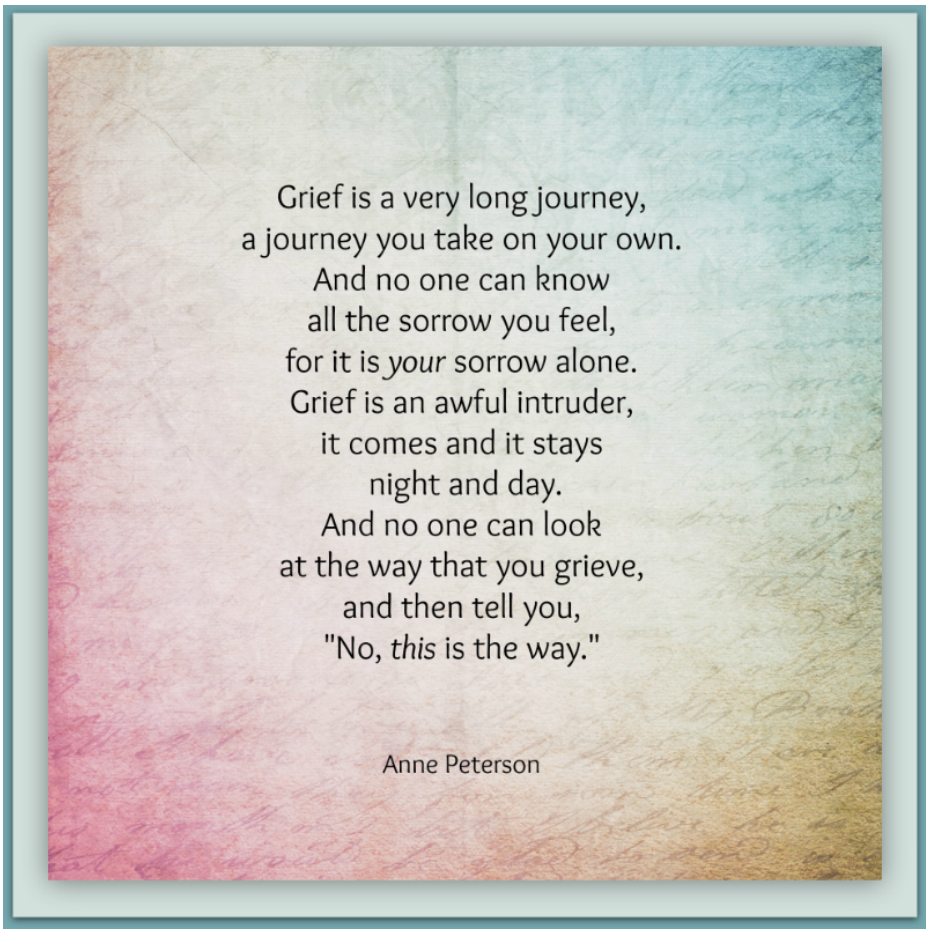
cover photo by Jessica Peterson

You sit looking at the coffin before you. You hurt with your friend who's sitting in that front row. Pretty soon, you'll be walking up there, and eventually, talking to her.

Your stomach is in knots because it's almost your turn, but you have no idea what you should say. You almost didn't come, but you had to. That's what friends do.

If only there was a guide for moments like these, so that you knew what to say, what to do.

Having had a lot of experience with grief, I want to share 17 Things You Need to Know to Help Someone in Grief.



Grief is a very long journey,
a journey you take on your own.

And no one can know
all the sorrow you feel,
for it is *your* sorrow alone.

Grief is an awful intruder,
it comes and it stays
night and day.

And no one can look
at the way that you grieve,
and then tell you,
"No, *this* is the way."

Anne Peterson

1. Everyone grieves differently

Some people will express their feelings of sadness, some people are more private.

Grief is an outward expression of what's going on when you've lost a loved one.

Grief is not a one-size-fits-all. It's more of a customized fit.

Because we are all different, we should not presume we know how to comfort someone.

Pat answers will not bring comfort.

Sometimes saying nothing and just giving a hug, or squeezing a hand conveys you are there with them.

2. Words are not always necessary

When my son lost his precious 14-month-old daughter, our granddaughter, one of their friends came over, unaware the baby had just died.

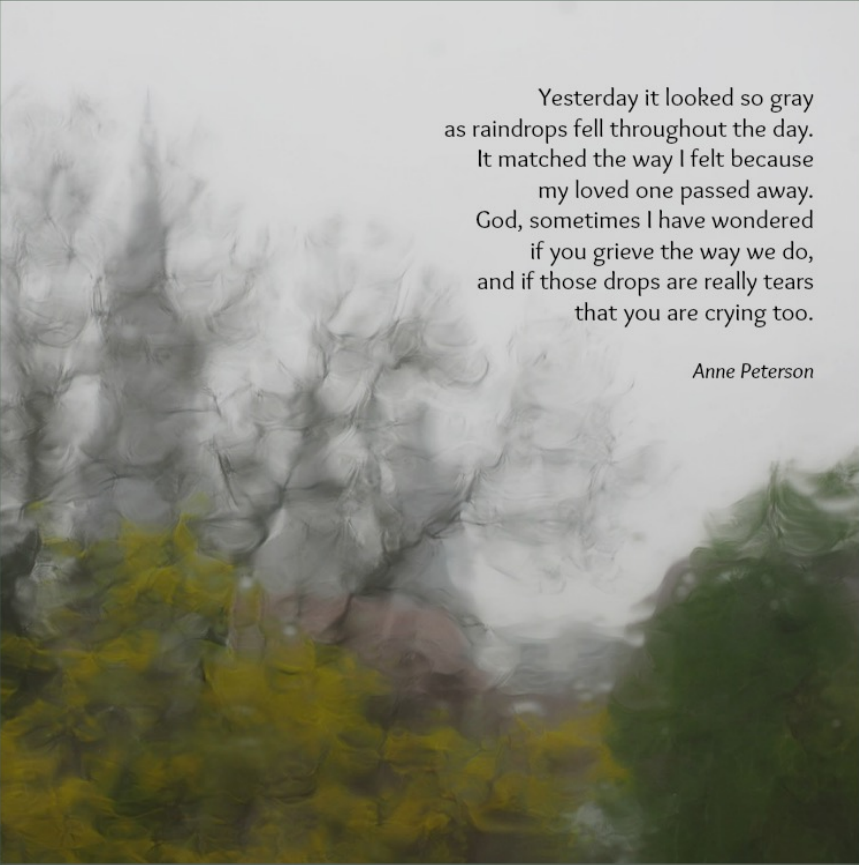
When she realized what had happened, there were no words, but her tears said it all. I'm glad God created tears.

And even without words, they knew she was in this with them.

The story is told of a family whose neighbor just lost his wife. When their little boy, Johnny, heard what happened, he asked if he could go next door. The parents gave him permission, and when Johnny returned home they asked,

“What did you tell Mr. Jones?”

“I didn't say nuthin' to him, “ Johnny responded. “I just helped him cry.”



Yesterday it looked so gray
as raindrops fell throughout the day.
It matched the way I felt because
my loved one passed away.
God, sometimes I have wondered
if you grieve the way we do,
and if those drops are really tears
that you are crying too.

Anne Peterson

3. Avoiding the person in grief adds to the griever's pain.

When a good friend of mine lost her precious child, there were things said that hurt her.

“What was even worse,” Jeannie said, “were the friends who just stopped talking to me altogether. Their silence felt like they were pretending none of it happened.”

Acknowledging the death, validates the life of the person lost. It honors both the loved one who died and the person who is grieving.

4. Grief has no timetable

It is unfair to put a time limit, or even guess how long the process of grief will take.

It's true, when your friend or family member loses a loved one, it feels like you've lost the griever too.

You want them back, and you want things to be as they were. They have lost a part of themselves. And they will be changed forever.

How long should grief take? As long as it takes.

You never stop missing your loved one. So the best thing we can give those who are grieving is time.

Give them all the time they need, and then give them more.



I'm missing who I used to be when I would be with you,
It's like I lost a part of me, I was accustomed to.

Anne Peterson

www.annepeterson.com

5. Grief has many emotions.

People whose loved ones are grieving will see them express sadness. This is a given and expected. But sometimes, underneath the sadness will be anger. Questions that have no answers.

Questions even for God, such as:

How could he let this happen?

Why didn't he stop this?

How will I go on without him/her?

Sometimes it's easier to accept the sadness in your griever. But when anger rears, we may be tempted to step back. Fight that temptation.

The griever needs to know their feelings are normal, even the anger.

And God who has created our feelings can absolutely handle them. He sees our broken hearts.

The best thing to do is to give your griever time and space. They need freedom to feel what they feel, whatever that looks like. Because the truth is, feelings are neither right nor wrong, they just are.

I'm on a journey known as grief,
with sadness far beyond belief.
Lord, I'm just looking for relief,
or will this hurt for years?
And then I heard my Father say,
"You need to take it day by day,
remembering I'm there with you,
to gather all your tears."

Anne Peterson

www.annepeterson.com

6. People in grief can't always tell you what they need.

Often people will say to their griever, "Let me know if there's anything you need."

When you lose a loved one, you feel like you've lost a part of yourself.

Your ability to think is greatly altered. Things that were normally done without much thought, now become laborious.

The person in grief cannot even think of meeting their most basic needs. So telling them to let you know what they need is ineffective.

They're not even sure what they'll be doing in the next few minutes, so how can they express what they need? They don't even know.


7. One of the griever's biggest fears is...

Deep inside, when you lose a loved one, you are afraid others will forget them. And that fear eats away as the days turn into weeks and months.

One of the biggest gifts you can give your griever is the opportunity for them to talk about their loved one. Engage them in conversation. Ask questions. And even if they have shared a story you've heard, give them your undivided attention.

Sharing about their lost loved one is a way to keep those memories fresh. Even saying their loved one's name brings them closer in a time they feel so far away.

Memories are a wonderful source of comfort, but it's even endearing when you can share those memories out loud with another person. Be that person.



Why is life so fragile? I asked the Lord today.
People struggle with their health, others slip away.

"This isn't what I planned, my child," my Father says to me.
"There's more to life, than what you see; I've made eternity."

Anne Peterson

www.annepeterson.com

8. When people are grieving, expect just about anything.

Grief is like waves.

In grief, you can be fine one moment, and the next be in pieces.

The griever can feel fine, when all of a sudden, out of the blue, a wave of grief flows over them, and they are overwhelmed by it.

Maybe they see someone who looks like their loved one, or meet someone by the same name. It can be a smell, or even a song heard on the radio.

Anything can trigger the memory of their loved one. Those waves can come out of nowhere.

Everyone expects it to be hard on anniversary dates, and even the “firsts.”

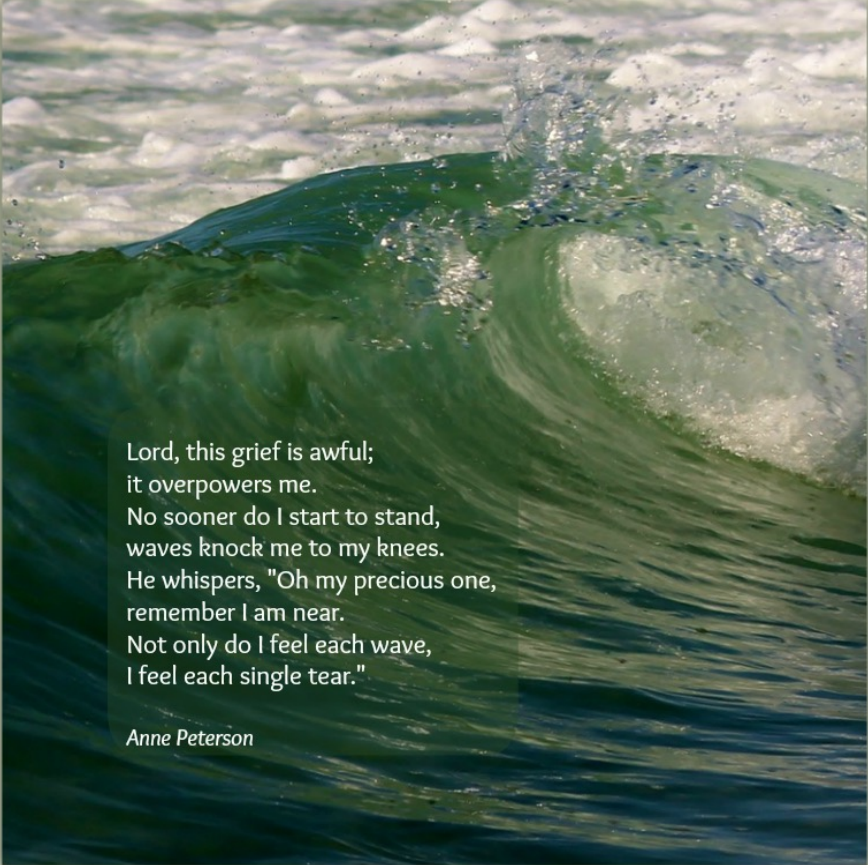
The first time you had Christmas without them.

The first time you saw your friends since the funeral.

The first time you had to tell someone who didn't know.

Knowing waves will come is helpful. Just be sensitive to their many moods.

They can't help it if they're thrown off balance. They never see it coming.



Lord, this grief is awful;
it overpowers me.
No sooner do I start to stand,
waves knock me to my knees.
He whispers, "Oh my precious one,
remember I am near.
Not only do I feel each wave,
I feel each single tear."

Anne Peterson

9. There's no such thing as moving on.

Moving on is an impossibility. Those very words make it sound as if they are supposed to leave their loved one behind. It's not going to happen.

Grief is a solitary journey. It's a journey they never asked to take, and yet, there they are, painfully going through every step.

When someone expects them to steadily move through their grief, it prolongs the whole process.

They start wondering what's wrong with them that it's taking so long.

Grief is not linear, moving in a straight line. Instead it is cyclical. There are ups, there are downs, and it's constantly moving.

10. Those in grief need understanding.

Don't have any expectations of your griever. Give them understanding when they say things that sound harsh. Be gracious to them.

Give them a listening ear when they are short with little patience.

Their whole world has collapsed and they are trying their best to not crumble themselves.

If you understand this and have little expectations, they will be freer to be where they are.

Think to yourself what *you* might need, and offer that to the person in grief.

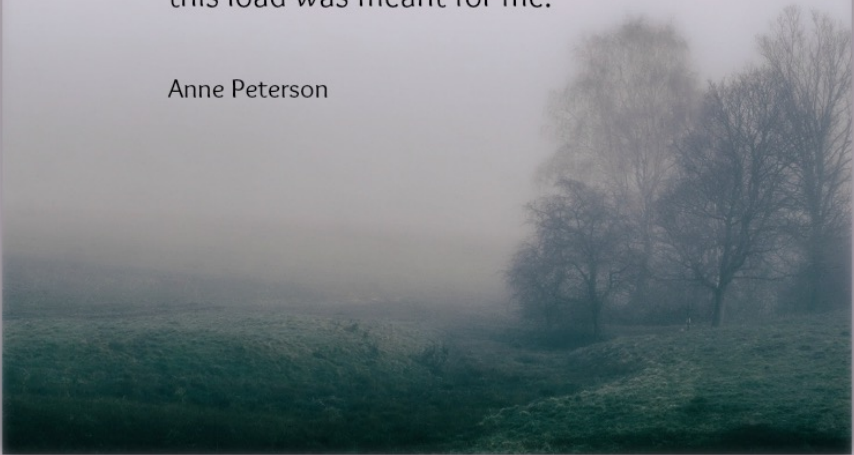
Don't ask the griever to call you, call them. Even when the one who is grieving is a good friend or a close family member, take the initiative and call him/her. They are using all their energy in just trying to cope.

Or show up and let them know what you were thinking of doing to help them. It can be simple things like running to the store, or doing a load of their laundry.

By giving them your understanding, you are helping create a safe place so they can get on with the hardest thing they have to do, grieve their precious loved one.

Lord, this load's too heavy,
that you're asking me to bear.
I've looked around for help,
but found, it wasn't anywhere.
And then my Father took my load,
and whispered tenderly,
"This wasn't yours to hold, my child;
this load was meant for me."

Anne Peterson



www.annepeterson.com

11. Things we might want to avoid saying to those in grief.

Having talked to many people in grief, here's a list of things they told me they found hurtful. Avoid saying these things to someone in grief:

He/she is in a better place.

The only place they want the one they lost is back with them. To the griever, nothing would be better than that.

At least they're not suffering anymore.

They don't want their loved one to suffer. They just want them back.

At least you have other children.

Each person is unique. Each child has their place in a family and when one died, there is a hole where that person was.

It's time for you to move on.

Again, there is no timetable for grief. This implies they are not grieving the right way, they should be further along. It only adds another load to the heavy one they are already trying to bear.

I know how you feel.

Please fight the urge to tell your griever those words.

Because even if you have also lost a loved one, even if your situation is identical to theirs, you do NOT know how they feel. No one knows how another person feels.

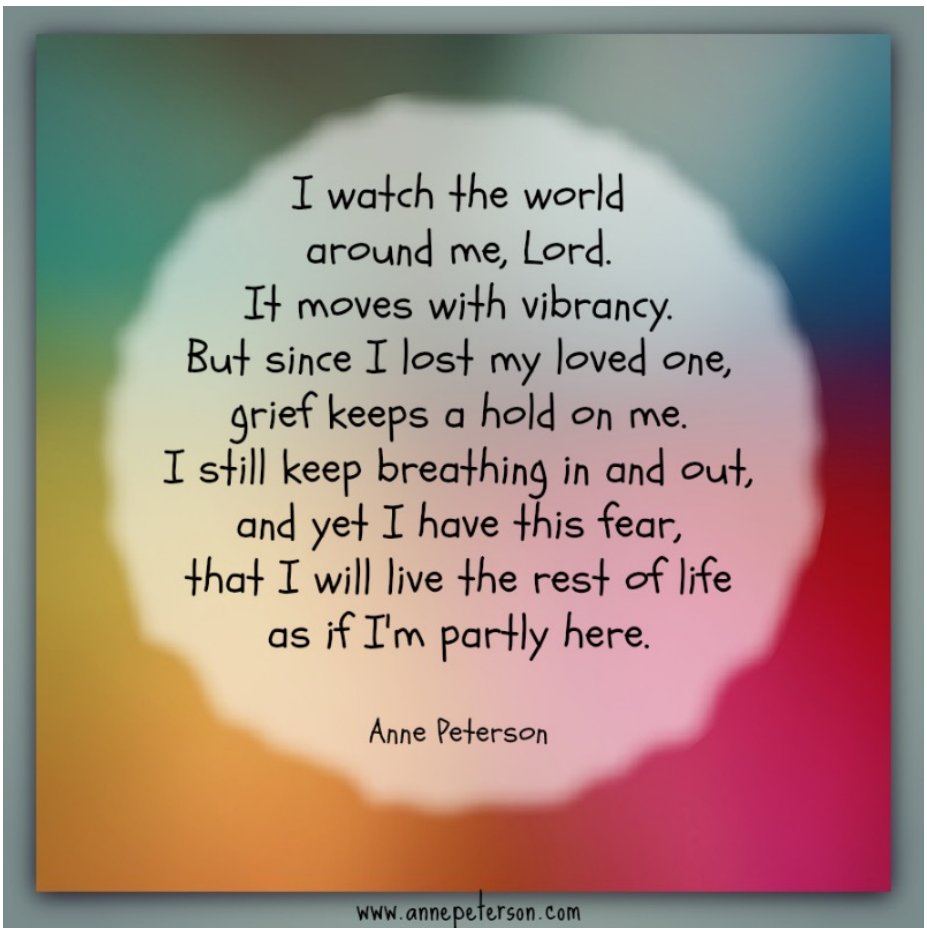
When we tell another person, “I know how you feel,” it then becomes about us instead of about them.

And the truth is, no one can know how another person feels. If you have empathy, if you are a caring person, your griever will be able to tell that without you saying those words.

Many people have shared with me through the years how that one phrase has made them cringe.

One person even shared hearing, “I know how you feel, I lost my pet.” The griever had lost her child.

Show them you care, don't tell them about it.

The background is a soft, multi-colored gradient. It features a central white circle with a slightly irregular, hand-drawn edge. The colors transition from a light green and blue at the top, through yellow and orange at the bottom, to a vibrant pink and red on the right side. The text is centered within the white circle.

I watch the world
around me, Lord.
It moves with vibrancy.
But since I lost my loved one,
grief keeps a hold on me.
I still keep breathing in and out,
and yet I have this fear,
that I will live the rest of life
as if I'm partly here.

Anne Peterson

www.annepeterson.com

God must have needed them.

It's hard enough dealing with the loss of a loved one without saying, "God took them." Right then, they see that they needed their loved one. God has all the people in the world, he didn't need their loved one more than they need them.

They finished the work God had for them to do.

Once again this is not the issue. They can't think about concepts like that. Right then, all they can think of is how much their loved one gave them, and now it's gone. Their pain is screaming much louder than anything else they hear.

He/she is your angel now.

When you miss the voice or the touch of a loved one, thinking of them as an angel does not give comfort.

12. Sharing verses is not always helpful

As much as I love God's Word, when a person is in grief, some are unable to handle a lot of things which take brain power.

Always ask someone if you can share a verse with them. This way you'll know if they are in a place where they can receive it. And if they're not, respect their wishes.

Scripture can help others, it is comforting and truth. It's just that some people may not be able to process very much in the beginning.

These days have been a
whirlwind, Lord,
things flying everywhere.
All I did was hold on tight,
and ask my friends for prayer.
The dust has finally settled
and I can clearly see.
You were in the whirlwind too,
sitting next to me.

Anne Peterson

www.annepeterson.com

13. Those in grief need continual prayer

The best thing we can do is pray as we're interacting with our griever. Visit the throne room as many times as you think of them, asking God to be their comfort. Asking God to encircle them in his loving arms.

And if your griever is comfortable, pray for them out loud. In that way, you are letting them be part of the process of bringing it before the Lord. But if that is not possible, you can still bring them up to the Lord as many times as God puts them on your heart.

The Bible tells us that God is close to the broken hearted. And while you watch your griever hurt, remember that God does care about them.

God can give you the words when you are with your griever. And he can also direct you to keep silent, when that is what you should do.

God gives us comfort so we can pass it on. We are not meant to be reservoirs, but instead we are to be channels.

14. Those who are grieving need hope

The Bible says without hope, the people perish. We all need hope.

Let your griever know there is an after life. And if their loved one is a Christ follower, they will be reunited in heaven.

Remind them, this world is not all there is.

And if they are not sure their loved one is a believer, just tell them only God knows. And maybe the one they lost decided to trust in Christ before they took their last breath.

It helps to know you're with me, Lord,
as I am in this trial.
To know that you will walk with me,
each step, and every mile.
To know you hold the future
and you're not constrained by time.
But most of all, it helps to know,
I'm *always* on your mind.

Anne Peterson

www.annepeterson.com

15. Tears are a necessary part of grief.

I have seen more people apologize when their tears come.

There's nothing to apologize for when we cry. Even Jesus wept when he went to the home of Mary and Martha, after Lazarus died. And Jesus knew he was going to raise him from the dead!

Why did he cry? Because he was touched.

Tears are a universal language.

Tears are valuable to God, and he saves every tear we cry in a bottle. Believe me, I have many bottles up there.

Crying with your griever is a privilege.

Tears are healing.

16. Those in grief may need to talk.

Love your griever, right where they are.

Let them know you're not going anywhere.

Tell them what a privilege it is to share in these hard moments with them.

You will be a cup of water to someone whose soul is parched.

And you will also be pleasing God by ministering to one of his hurting children.

Flowers Page

I feel my life is sketchy, Lord,
with lines all out of place.
And things I thought
were permanent,
are suddenly erased.
And then I heard him whisper,
"My child, someday you'll see,
there's nothing
here on earth that lasts,
just in eternity."

temporary

Anne Peterson

17. Those who are grieving need love.

Let your griever know how much they mean to you.

Hug them, touch their hand.

When it's an anniversary date of when they lost their loved one, or it's their loved one's birthday, make a note of it.

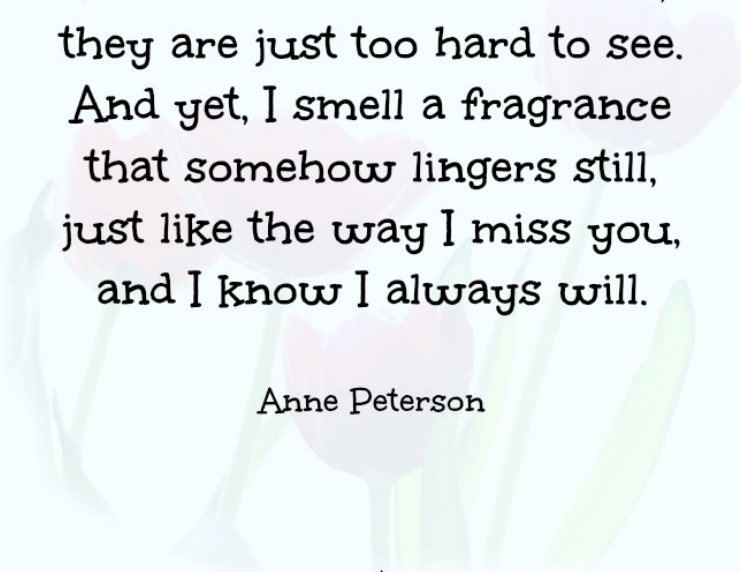
Drop them a line.

Bring them a flower.

Make a donation in the name of their loved one.

Take them out for coffee.

And in doing so, you will be honoring the one they lost and showing them what it looks like to weep with those who weep.



I hardly see the flowers
that parade in front of me.
Their colors seem so faded,
they are just too hard to see.
And yet, I smell a fragrance
that somehow lingers still,
just like the way I miss you,
and I know I always will.

Anne Peterson

www.annepeterson.com

Dear Reader,

I hope you found this information helpful. People who lose a loved one are fragile. If we treat them with gentleness they will know how much they mean to us.

And isn't that the most important thing right now?

If you enjoyed this piece maybe you'd like to check out other pieces I've written on [Medium](#).

I am a poet, speaker and published author of 14 books. You can check out my Amazon author page [here](#). There you'll be able to see my books and view my trailers.

Maybe your griever would find Droplets a comfort. It is a book I wrote of poems for those in grief.

Warmly,

Anne

Follow me at the links below:

Website: <http://www.annepeterson.com>

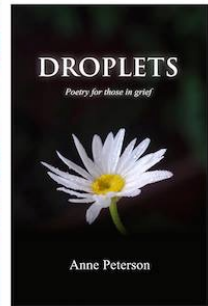
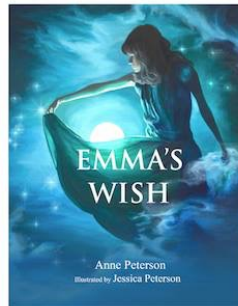
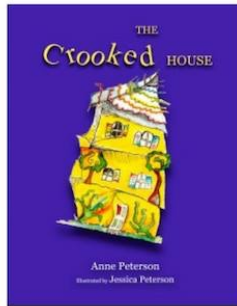
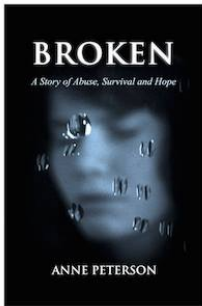
Author: <https://www.facebook.com/annepetersonwrites/>

Medium: <https://medium.com/@annegolliaspeterson/latest>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/annepeterson>

Pinterest: <https://www.pinterest.com/annepeterson2/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/annepetersonpoet>



And more . . .