

“The Meaning of Grief” by David Kessler

Anyone who has suffered the loss of something of great value to them is faced with a choice between retreating into the darkness and searching for meaning in their loss.

This may not feel like a real choice for those of us going through it. But one thing is certain: we cannot return unscathed to the life we were living before our loss.

The untimely death of a loved-one must be one of the strongest ways that loss can come into our lives, leaving us, the survivors, unsure of what remains from which to build a new life, even as we realize that we need one now.

Thankfully, there are resources we can turn to for help in this predicament. The book I am reading, *The Meaning of Grief* by David Kessler, is one such resource. I expected this book would give me insights into my grieving process, and it did, helping me see how to witness my own grief, and how healing can come from finding meaning in it.

It's been more than two years ago now, as measured in survivor time since Jon ended his life. I am struggling to discover meaning in my own life, meaning that Jon was ultimately unable to find for himself in his. But whatever meaning I find now mustn't be just for myself. I hope I can share it with Jon; and for that I need to learn a new skill.

Jon's life has meaning in its own right. How could it not? All those hours spent at his desk working on the only things that seemed to ever let him feel that he was doing a good job, that allowed him to feel that he was earning respect in his own eyes and in the eyes of the world; all that showing up to deal with strangers on the moors of an unforgiving landscape? His final words to me, “I never hit you” as he walked into his room and took a hit for the team, reveal that until the end he was guided by a sense of right and wrong, and by a fading ideal of what it means to be a human being. And perhaps he was asking for forgiveness for what he was about to do.

As I take up the task of understanding Jon's life and its meaning, I need to decode a message that I believe he left me: *This world is too sacred to leave in the hands of the lowest common denominator, as we ransack Mother Earth and cast aside the lives of living beings every moment of the day and night.*

As I try to forgive my past actions and inactions, regain self-respect in the present, and courage to face a future without Jon, I am realizing that my life has been so much easier than his that I can't truly fathom the unremitting pain he had to face. So, I am trying to remember how courageously he faced the adversity he was given in this life, so that I can offer his memory the honor he deserves for all he endured during 27 years of loneliness, as he struggled to free his mainsail, so deeply tangled in the weeds of a world in which he never felt he belonged.