



THE ACT OF WRITING GRIEF

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Sometimes we are forced to be silent. Out of self-preservation, and to protect those closest to us, we hide away our tears and create little boxes in which we place our wellsprings of pain—away from the eyes, judgments, and emotions of others. Yet I believe we have an innate desire to share our most wrenching sorrows. We long for another to hold us by the fiber of our thinnest skin and to witness as we navigate the mountainous terrain of pain. Grief is often ascribed to the time following someone's passing, but there is another dimension to this state of being: the intense grief of losing—or not acknowledging—those parts of ourselves that lie buried beneath the surface.

My own grief has complicated origins. At thirteen months old, I was adopted out of war-torn El Salvador by a white American woman. Severed from my birth mother, the Spanish language, and the indigenous, European, and African cultures of my ancestors, I was brought up by my adoptive mother in a suburb of Cleveland, Ohio—a brown girl in a white world. As a child, I actively avoided Spanish lessons and the mention of El Salvador, trying to pretend that I was not a Latina. I didn't recognize the olive-skinned, raven-haired, stocky, and petite girl who stared back at me in the mirror. I wanted to smash the image of the Other crying at me in the bathroom. I cringe to think about how hard I tried to fit, to erase so much of myself.

The real challenge of facing my identity and the grief I felt as an adoptee came as I started college. Bereft of language and vocabulary, I had no anchor to ground my emotional experiences. I was about to be nineteen years old, the age of my birthmother when war and adoption separated me from her, when I stood in an acting class and shared my adoption story for the first time. Buried in the simple sentences of my handwritten monologue was the grief of my ancestors, the grief of the young woman who gave me away amidst terrifying conditions, and perhaps even the grief that my adoptive mother experienced when she couldn't conceive children. My tears came with the breaking of my silence.

I would like to say that sharing my story gave me closure, but this was not the case. Instead, it freed me to begin the journey of acknowledging the grief of my adoption and my relationship to historical trauma.

As I sought out voices that echoed my own, I spent countless hours reading the works of Joy Harjo, Gloria Anzaldúa, Sandra Cisneros, Audre Lorde, and Louise Erdrich. From these and other American women writers of color, I gathered strength and solace. In their articulations of finding

voice, they wrote about the unspeakable, about silence and invisibility. They gave voice to the pain of their ancestors and communities. Even if their stories didn't exactly reflect my own experiences, I witnessed how writing and sharing our grief can transform and inspire.

I get to see this vulnerability, empowerment, and healing through language in my work as a writing tutor. When I sit with writers, I sometimes sense the familiar terror of being known, of having someone actually see you and hold your words, no matter how messy or bare. The veins of self are inevitably present even in the most academic of writing.

My own journey as a writer and tutor has helped me to evolve into a young woman with an ear tuned to the pulse of what goes unspoken, what we are silent about, our innermost grief. Our ultimate power as writers lies in showing the world our truths and taking ownership of our ideas and words.

I no longer avoid or silence the woman in pain staring back at me. I no longer overlook my connection to my foremothers. Through writing my grief, I am finding a link back to my history, and in this, there is power.