

“Grief Is a Spectrum Too”

Jorge Gutierrez: Hello, my name is Jorge Gutierrez. I’m the director of the “Book of Life” and “Maya and the Three” and I’m on the autism spectrum. Grief is a spectrum, too. Grief, the response to loss can be difficult for anyone to express and process. For those on the autism spectrum like me the main thoughts and feelings of grief may be especially challenging yet may also provide unique ways of coping. The loss itself takes many forms, often the passing of a loved one.

Eli Weider: He was my father and I loved him. So he wasn’t there anymore. He was just in my heart.

Zachary Warren: When my grandmother GiGi passed because of Covid, it felt like Mrs. Claus died to me because everyday when I visited her, it was like a Christmas morning, where she would always be able to bake and make cookies, where she gave gifts and she was loving and she was kind.

Layla Weiner: When my dog Jasper passed away and he was about to die in my arms I told him I would never get another dog because I cannot replace him because that’s replacing my child. I couldn’t do that.

Jorge Gutierrez: For many on the autism spectrum the loss of routine can be profound.

Stephen Storti: Well I really do miss my animation at the studio. Pandemic happened like we all had to evacuate. It stinks!

Jorge Gutierrez: Not only are there various causes of grief, but one’s reaction to the loss covers a full range of emotions.

Zachary Warren: Every night it’s like a bottle of water or a bottle of liquid overflowing. And once I lay down that’s when the bottle cap just pops off and the tears come really.

Mei Mei Liu: My father had lung cancer which had spread. My mother responded like a Greek tragedy literally wailing for hours. I did cry not so much the day my father died but as time passed when I thought of him.

Jorge Gutierrez: Some on the autism spectrum deeply feel grief, yet keep these feelings deep within them. This can cause feelings of being misunderstood.

Eli Weider: I remember crying once my Dad... that was a long time after he passed. I just got a little emotional. I missed him but I wasn’t really, I mean, it was hard for me to be upset.

Jorge Gutierrez: Many on the autism spectrum work on their grief over time by making or displaying art.

Stephen Storti: I like doing something funny when I’m sad. Like I draw funny cartoons. Can I show you the rough animation I worked on?

Mei Mei Liu: I can’t sing or dance or act or paint due to my dyspraxia; however, actually I’m now a published poet.

Layla Weiner: The way I decided to work through the grief of my loss of my dog Jasper is to get a tribute tattoo of him because that way I have him to look at every day.

Jorge Gutierrez: Some cope with their grief as a necessity to be strong for others.

Eli Weider: Like with my Dad, when he had Alzheimer's, when I went to visit him, I said, If I'm in a good mood, he'll be in a good mood. So I said the same thing with my sister. If I'm in a good mood, it'll help her be in a good mood.

Jorge Gutierrez: Often the very memories that are most painful at first to recall eventually become the fond memories that heal.

Layla Weiner: For me, I try not to think about when he suffered. I try to think about going on adventures with him. One adventure me and Jasper did, I was about to turn 9 and my birthday party was in a forest and we dressed him like a fairy.

Jorge Gutierrez: Many work through their grief by reaching out to others or by reaching within or by doing both.

Male speaker: For a long while I had to talk with my family and then I had to meditate every night. I prayed to God every single night and I meditated and to this day, I still do that daily.

Jorge Gutierrez: Ultimately, grief is something one has to go through rather than around.

Mei Mei Liu: To me, grief is not a state but a journey or a process you travel through.

Eli Weider: Thank you so much because I actually feel a lot better today now that I've talked about it really.

Jorge Gutierrez: This short was made at Exceptional Minds.

(End credits)

Jorge Gutierrez: Zach! How come you never brought me any of your grandma's cookies?

Zachary Warren: The actual truthful answer is her cookies tasted way too darn good! (Laughter)