

A PSYCHOLOGIST LOOKS AT TWINLESS GRIEF

I know of what I speak. I was two years old when I lost my fraternal triplet sister. I lost my identical mirror twin in 2005. Each loss has been devastating. I grieved for my triplet whom I never got to know as I was growing up, and I grieve for my twin whom I knew so dearly.

Grief is the stiff price we all pay for loving and attaching. Grief has been seen as a process of stages that we need to travel. It was often seen as a process that would take about a year. Remember Jackie Kennedy wearing black for the year after her husband's assassination? The thinking now is that it might take up to three years. I doubt if some losses are ever fully gotten over. An accommodation to them is more likely. Being able to reconstruct your life without the person you loved being in it is now seen as the task at hand.

For twins the loss of their twin can be unfathomable. Denial shows itself as pure disbelief. They have never been alone. They have always been a pair. Death brings an individuation that has not been experienced nor anticipated.

Singletons have been individuals from the beginning. Twins have had each other, and experience themselves as such, no matter how early death has taken one of them away. Innate temperamental differences, parental influences (as in whose name always gets called first), and dynamics within the twinship (who acquires language first) affect the identity of each twin.

Grief allows us to know the importance of a relationship and the impact it has had on us. We will take and incorporate the good times, the lessons learned, the shared companionship and support and internalize it. We will then move on more human and enriched, whether slowly or quickly, into our futures.

Individuation is the normal process of becoming fully you. It takes a lifetime, but much of the work, started by age three and accelerated through the teen years, has been affected by the nature of the twinship. Twins find when they have lost their twin that their very sense of what is secure and predictable in life is up for grabs.

Taking the time for reflection, taking the time to take good care of yourself, talking with others, getting counseling when indicated, and finding your unique individuality while honoring your twinship are unique tasks of grieving a twin.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions, comments or thoughts.

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