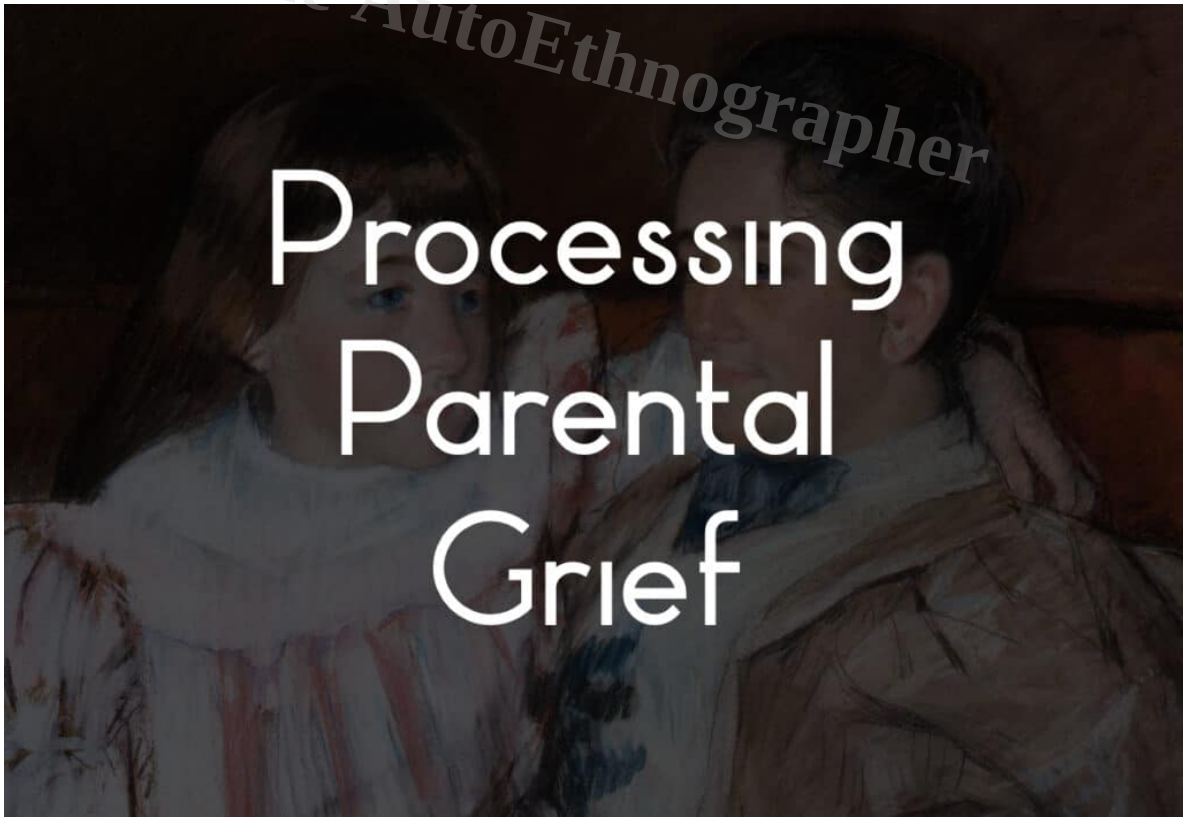
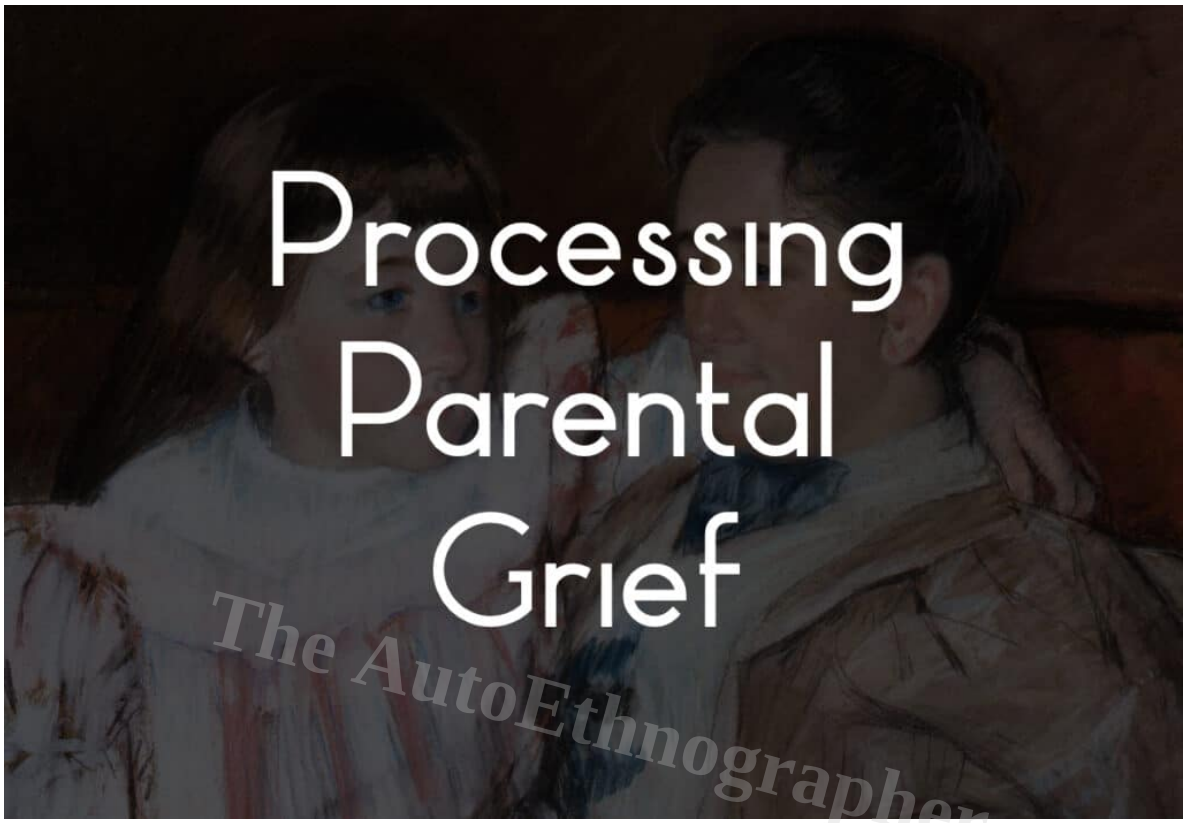


Processing Parental Grief: The Unexpected Joy of a Found Sweater

Description

The AutoEthnographer





Processing Parental Grief: The Unexpected Joy of a Found Sweater

Authorâ??s Memo

The following vignette is the first in my Processing Parental Grief series. In this column, I channel the moments I remember from being a nine-year-old girl when my mother died. From an autoethnographic standpoint, the joyous happy memories I shared with my mother, mixed with the pain I still have now looking back missing and remembering her, are used as a combined coping mechanism. Writing vignettes and compiling other parental death research over the last three decades, a *scriptotherapeutic* process, have helped me move forward with my healing. The pain has never fully gone, nor will it ever. But, these vignettes are special moments exploring the cultures of grief, where pain meets love and love meets pain.

For this first vignette, I wrote of my motherâ??s sweater as it always comforted me when she was alive, and how the sweater helped give me a little comfort right after she left. I donâ??t write these vignettes in first-person, but in short fictional story form. In a way, Iâ??m attempting to help others heal through

my personal pain. Dealing with parental grief has been the subject of two of my books: *Parental Death: The Ultimate Teen Guide*, and more recently, *Coping with Parental Death: Insights and Tips for Teenagers*.

The moment when little Kathy found out the news from her father was how I actually found out about my own mother when I was 9 years old. My motherâ??s name was Kathy, and we used to go to the mall and get doughnuts and hot chocolate often, just as described in the vignette. I tried to include a little piece of the overwhelming feeling of having our house fill up with people preparing funeral arrangements, which is often what kids feel when they find out their parent has died. My mother also died on a Friday morning, just like the vignette mentions.



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â??Sometimes when they would talk to people, Kathy would get shy and crawl inside that sweater; it would make her feel safe and loved, as if the softness of the sweater was her motherâ??s own arms wrapping around her.

The Sweater

It was Friday, and little Kathy woke up excited as always as she knew what day it was. Today was the day that she and her mother got to spend the whole day together doing girly stuff and hanging out like they do every Friday. They would start their day grabbing doughnuts and hot chocolate at the local doughnut shop, then go shopping together at the mall. Theyâ??d grab their favorite cookies at the Mrs. Fields store, eat lunch, then come home and paint their nails together while watching their favorite TV shows. It was a tradition theyâ??d been doing since as long as Kathy could remember, and it always made her feel special that her mother spent quality time with her.

Fridays were also special because her mother would wear Kathyâ??s favorite, long, white sweater with purple flowers sewn on it. She had loved her motherâ??s sweater because it always smelled like her perfume. Sometimes when they would talk to people, Kathy would get shy and crawl inside that sweater; it would make her feel safe and loved, as if the softness of the sweater was her motherâ??s own arms wrapping around her.

No one would have guessed that Kathyâ??s mother was sick because on the outside she didnâ??t look it; she was always smiling and happy. When Kathy went to go snuggle with her mom for morning hugs and kisses, she discovered instead that there were a bunch of people in her house. This wasnâ??t normal.

â??Just last night she and her mother were reading her favorite book together before bed. She had hugged and kissed her mother goodnight as they excitedly discussed their mall excursion. Kathy was so sad, and she suddenly felt like her heart was missing something.

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When Kathy went to her motherâ??s room, her father was sitting on the bed. â??Come here sweetie,â?• her father said.

Kathy walked over to her father and sat on his lap. â??Whereâ??s Mommy?â?• she asked. â??Iâ??m so excited to check out that new store that opened up at the mall.â?•

Her fatherâ??s eyes started to tear up, â??Iâ??m so sorry Kathy, but Mommy passed away last night. She is now up in Heaven watching over all of us.â?•

Kathy burst into tears. Just last night she and her mother were reading her favorite book together before bed. She had hugged and kissed her mother goodnight as they excitedly discussed their mall excursion. Kathy was so sad, and she suddenly felt like her heart was missing something.

All of the people that were at their house were friends and family members. They had heard the news of what happened, and everyone wanted to help comfort Kathy and to start planning funeral arrangements.

But Kathy still couldnâ??t believe her mother was suddenly gone. They were supposed to be up, right now, getting ready to go to the doughnut shop and then making their weekly mall outing. It was supposed to be a fun, happy day, not a sad day.

â??As she started to tear up, the sweater instantly felt like her motherâ??s arms wrapping around her. In that moment, Kathy realized she would never again be able to hide in that sweater while her mother was wearing it.

While everyone was in their family room planning the funeral, Kathy went to her motherâ??s room. She started looking at her motherâ??s bathroom counter. She saw the makeup her mother had been planning on wearing that day. And she smelled the perfume her mother had always worn. Then she started going through her closet. Flipping through her motherâ??s clothes, memories popped up of when her mother wore this dress, or that blouse.

Then Kathy came across her motherâ??s long, white sweater with the purple flowers sewn on it. It was the very one that always comforted her when she and her mother were out and about.

Kathy took the sweater off the hanger and put it on.

As she started to tear up, the sweater instantly felt like her motherâ??s arms wrapping around her. In that moment, Kathy realized she would never again be able to hide in that sweater while her mother was wearing it.

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She would never be able to give her mother a hug or kiss, share doughnuts and hot chocolate with her, or paint their nails together.

However, Kathy knew she could always keep her motherâ??s sweater. Maybe one day it might make her feel as if her mother were still with her.

Credits

Featured image by Mary Cassat, Shelbourne Museum

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