**Poetry from Daily Life: Grieving — and healing — through poetry**

By Ken Slesarik

*My guest today on Poetry from Daily Life is Ken Slesarik, who lives in Phoenix, Arizona. Ken became a writer 17 years ago and after the loss of his son began to focus on grief and loss poetry. Two books he recommends are "Voices of the Grieving Heart," edited by Mike Bernhardt and one of his own titles for children, "Grievers and Poets: When a Loved One Dies." One unique fact about Ken is that he was an amateur boxer in his youth. ~ David L. Harrison*

In December of 2019, my son Kenny died. My grief was crushing and profuse. Love, anger, pain and anguish screamed for my attention as I struggled to come to terms with the empty seat at our kitchen table.

My body was flooded with the stress hormone cortisol for the better part of two years. I lived in a state of panic and my whole world was altered. Being in crowds became unbearable. Gradually, I learned that poetry can be therapeutic. Reading the words and experiences of others made me feel less alone and realize that isolation is not a healthy path. Grief is not linear, so I often revisit a favorite poem as needed.

I had written poetry for children for many years before Kenny’s passing. During a painful and prolonged grieving period my passion was rekindled after I was asked to contribute to a grief anthology for adults.

My writing process has changed. I learned to surrender to the pain and even befriend it. When I write a poem about my grief, I often open a sealed bag that holds Kenny’s unwashed basketball jersey. As I breathe in his pungent smell, I mourn and heal. I am unconcerned with writing anything “good” or publishable. The result for me is a stronger first draft and then the real work begins.

Just as eulogies are written for the living, so is grief poetry. Poetry can say what needs to be said when ordinary words won’t suffice. It can remind us of a connection and love shared. It can heal and make us feel less alone.

One of the major lessons I’ve learned about grief is that we need to feel it to heal it. By that I mean we need to gently confront the nuances of our loss in small but manageable doses. What better way to do this than by reading or writing poetry that cuts deep and subsequently heals.

For those that have experienced a crushing loss, reading and writing poetry can be an integral part of the grieving process and I want you to know that I weep with and for you.

**Without Question**

All is quiet, but much is happening. Questions

answered, feelings sorted, and some things I’m

not yet ready to know. And so, I close my eyes

and realize: love remains, despite the pain,

and without question, you’re still with me always.

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*Ken Slesarik is a children's poet and grief educator from Phoenix, Arizona. Many of his poems have been published in magazines and anthologies. Ken's mission is to empower those who grieve through the healing power of poetry. He regularly hosts poetry programs for students. Ken speaks at conferences, writes poetry curricula, and enjoys providing professional development for teachers. For information on his programs for grieving children please visit*[*http://grieversandpoets.com*](http://grieversandpoets.com/)*.*