



A Season of Grief (Southern Tier Editions)

Bill Valentine

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This unique book celebrates a long-term, interracial relationship and details the everyday struggles of a surviving partner trying to carry on in a radically changed world.

A Season of Grief chronicles the author's emotional descent after the violent death of his partner of 21 years. Bill Valentine's journal of fear, anger, denial, and loneliness captures the glimmers of hope, moments of serendipity, and mysterious coincidences that emerged from his full-time devotion to grief following the death of Joe Lopes. Lopes died along with 264 others when American Airlines Flight 587 crashed in November 2001 in route to the Dominican Republic. It was the second deadliest accident in U.S. aviation history.

He is a word always on my lips as I try to work him into a conversation. He is a memory that I strive to keep alive. So yes, in this sense, he is not gone. But in reality, he is. He is gone as my lover. He is gone as my life partner. He is gone as my soul mate, the only person to whom I periodically bared my soul. He is gone as my best friend, the only person to whom I ever attached that label. So pardon me while I still hang on to the notion that he is not here with me. Pardon me while I cling stubbornly to the insistence that he is gone.

Valentine's candid and thoughtful account of his heartbreak efforts to make sense of his partner's death—and survive in a world without him—is by turns, funny, frightening, sobering, and surprising. In the nine months following the tragedy of Flight 587, Valentine finds every waking moment of his life affected by his partner's absence—from mundane household chores to major life decisions. A Season of Grief is a story told in darkness and light, of hurt and healing, love and loneliness, but mostly, of a man who learns to live with his partner's absence through the persistent, surprising evidence of his presence.

Our job on earth is to live with uncertainty, ambiguity, and hope. We are given a limited tool set but one, in my opinion, that's sufficient for the job. Sufficient to allow us to be engaged in life-to love, grieve, work, play, celebrate, and despair. We have a remarkable ability to rebound and grow. We have been granted the capacity for wonder and laughter—especially at ourselves. These last two gifts were bestowed generously on Joe and he, in turn, taught me how vital they are.

Making a strong case for gay marriage, A Season of Grief chronicles Valentine's struggles to be recognized as a surviving spouse, including a historic lawsuit with Lambda Legal Defense and Education fund against the New York State Workers Compensation Board. Valentine and Lopes took every conceivable step to formalize their relationship, including New York City Domestic Partnership, but the Workers Compensation Board and a New York State appeals court refused to recognize Valentine as a legal surviving spouse.

Grief doesn't come with a set of instructions. But A Season of Grief can help guide you through the lonely journey that follows the death of a loved one. Valentine's memoir is a testament to the healing power of reality and the enduring nature of love.

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