

TRANSCRIPT

On Your Terms



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Episode 149:

NAVIGATING GRIEF WITH THERAPIST, GINA MOFFA

Sam Vander Wielen:

Hey there and welcome back to On Your Terms. I'm your host, Sam Vander Wielen. And today, we are talking about, yes, a tough topic, but a very, very important one. And I'm going to ask you to hang in there even if you have not directly experienced grief, especially because within the first minute or two of Gina speaking to you today, she's going to explain to you why that's not even true. But it is really important that we have this conversation about grief, not only because we're business owners, but we're friends, too. Right.

And I know that as I have shared a lot and very openly about my own grief journey, I've heard from so many of you that you're on a similar path. You know, fortunately or unfortunately, I hear from so many of you that you might be going through what I went through with my dad, where there was a lot of anticipatory grief because he was diagnosed with terminal cancer. And then I was his caregiver at such a young age. And I felt like I couldn't relate to a lot of other people. A lot of my friends hadn't been through anything similar to that. And having such a prolonged period where I knew his death was coming, watching him get worse and worse, it was heartbreaking. It was very, very difficult. And in case you don't know, I very quickly lost my mom right after I lost my dad.

I think it's a uniquely hard thing to run a business like we have and go through all of this, whether you go through it once, twice or even more. Our job is kind of like public facing. We have to point our phones at our faces and talk. And it's just weird, right? It's normal in our industry to be on video all the time and to be sharing parts of our life, to be vulnerable and to always be helpful. Like we're taught from a very "early age" in business that whatever you do, you got to be helpful, educational content, tips here, tips there. Right. That's really hard to do when you're grieving.

I thought that Gina had this beautiful quote from her new book called *Moving On Doesn't Mean Letting Go*. And I'm going to tell you more about her book. It just came out a couple of days ago. You have to go get this book. I'm so excited for you to read it and get your hands on it if you're grieving or going through any sort of grief process or if you're supporting anybody through that journey. Here's a quote from Gina in her book. She said, "When the pain and anxiety seems endless, when the frustration hits its peak, when all you've lost piles up so high, you can hardly see over your mountain of grief, please return to the simple things. To breathe, tend to your needs and put tenderness with self above all else for a while."

That is such a great intro to this episode with Gina because I just thought she has such a refreshing take on grief. I love her more expansive and, I don't know, inclusive definition of grief, and she's just a very calming, lovely person anyway. So like to talk about such a difficult topic with someone like her is just makes it so much easier. So I hope that you enjoy this episode. I understand it's a difficult topic. I do encourage you to listen to it, even if you think you haven't been through grief already.

I think one of the really important things that came up in this conversation was about how I wish I had learned more about grief before I went through it, because I could have been a better support to the other people around me. For me at least, it wasn't until I lost, well, my dad first that I then noticed like, oh shoot, I haven't been like the best supportive friend to other people who have lost people before me. And that's what allows me to give a lot of grace to people now because I recognize that I was them. And so, like, I can't get on my high horse now and think that people who haven't lost someone should be like the best, most perfect support system for me when I wasn't able to do that for other people before I knew. And Gina and I talk about that a little bit, but looking back on it, I wish I would have invested a little more even while my dad was sick. So I encourage you to hang in there. We talked through all the things and so many of you submitted such great questions on Instagram. I ask all of those at the end.

And speaking of the end, you're going to want to listen all the way through this episode because at the end of the episode I share my top three

takeaways from my conversation with Gina, and it was hard to narrow it down to three. So hang in there for my top three takeaways.

With that, I am so excited to bring you Gina Moffa. Gina is a licensed psychotherapist, mental health educator and media consultant in New York City. In practice for nearly two decades. She has helped thousands of people seeking treatment for trauma, grief, as well as challenging life experiences and transitions. This includes work with Holocaust survivors at 92 Y, as well as being a clinical director for a Mount Sinai Hospital outpatient program, the Addiction Institute in Mount Sinai that specializes in substance use disorder.

She received her master's degree in social work with a specialty in trauma from New York University. And most recently, Gina has written a book on grief called *Moving On Doesn't Mean Letting Go, A Modern Guide to Navigating Loss*, which is coming out through Hachette Book Group, the same publisher as I am with. Gina's brand-new book, *Moving On Doesn't Mean Letting Go* was just released to the world on August 22nd, 2023. You can get Gina's new book wherever you like to buy your books from. I've included links for you down below, but please, please, please go and support Gina's book. It's so important to a new author, a new book that comes out that if you're going to get it, you go and support it wherever you get your books. With that, let's hop into Gina's episode.

Okay. Welcome, Gina. Welcome to *On Your Terms*.

Gina Moffa:

Sam, thank you so much. Thanks for having me. I'm so excited to be here with you.

Sam Vander Wielen:

I'm so excited to be here with you. I was going to start off this episode with a joke, but I was like, maybe this poor woman is not in the mood for a joke after a long day. And I was going to be like, thanks for joining me for my one-hour personal therapy session. And like, how much time do you have? No. But I'm always talking enough about my own grief situation. But one of the things I was thinking about as I was preparing for today's episode was why should somebody listen to this episode who maybe hasn't

gone through what I've gone through or you've gone through, hasn't lost a parent, let alone someone close to them? Why do you think grief is important to all of us?

Gina Moffa:

Well, a couple of things. First, if you think you haven't gone through any kind of loss, you are sadly mistaken because we so often associate grief in this society with death related losses. But if you really think about it, look back at your life and you have grieved on so many different levels. I mean, anyone listening, if you've ever been through a breakup of any kind, if you even left a school, high school and went to college, and had a good high school education life, you were mourning that. Friendship losses, job losses. Like being looked over for a promotion of some kind, not getting a client that you thought you would get. These often can bring up at least a relationship to other losses in our lives.

But we have to begin as a society to look beyond death related loss. And if you are somebody who sees grief as death related loss and you haven't lost anyone yet, bless your heart, you will. And so and you may be running a business. So why not get a few steps ahead and listen to this and be prepared and think about things that you may need to think about before you're surprised. But everyone has experienced loss.

Sam Vander Wielen:

Yeah, absolutely. That's such a good way to think about it and I feel like once you've lost someone who's very close to you, it does make you realize all the times that you weren't there for other people quite the way that you wish you would have been because you just didn't understand you meant well. But I know, like when I lost my dad, I was like, oh, shoot, I should have reached out to that friend more. Like I should have done this or that.

And so I think there's also a lot to be learned about grief because people could be a better support to other people. But also, I know I hear from my audience, too, because a lot of people have done what I did in terms of leaving corporate and starting their own business, there's a bit of loss around like that identity of the job and the career and what you did, right?

Gina Moffa:

Yeah.

Sam Vander Wielen:

Yeah, absolutely.

Gina Moffa:

A hundred percent. We don't think of it like that. It's really layered. And you're starting something that's often really lonely at the start too. So you have to also rebuild in the same way you would rebuild after any big loss. You have to rebuild a whole new life for yourself because you have this new identity and it's often like we've chosen it, right? I have a private practice. You have a business. We chose this life. And yet, going through things and going into it is a very lonely endeavor.

Sam Vander Wielen:

Yeah, absolutely. So it helps to have other people who understand. So one of the things I wanted to ask you about off the bat was that I'm so excited that you have a new book that just came out, *Moving On Doesn't Mean Letting Go*, A Modern Guide to Navigating Loss. And I think, first of all, I think your title is brilliant. So Gina and I have the same publisher, by the way. And so I was just on a meeting with them the other day and I was like, I love her title and I love the cover. You guys have to go see it. But will you share with everyone what the book is about overall beyond the amazing title?

Gina Moffa:

Oh my goodness. Thank you. I love sharing the publisher with you. I have to say that. I love being this team now. We're GCP team.

Sam Vander Wielen:

I know right? I love it.

Gina Moffa:

I wrote the book because for me, I needed something. Look, I started this during the pandemic where non-death losses became kind of the thing. People were losing livelihoods. Businesses were going down that people just opened outside of the millions of deaths that were there. And it felt like the

people that I was working with weren't getting their needs met enough. And so for me, people were coming in to see me just so totally brain fogged and really just not knowing how to even answer emails or how to go on a date again or how to say no to things that they didn't want to go to.

And for me, I was like, you know what I'm hearing that your needs aren't being met. I'm hearing that any book referral I've given you doesn't speak to you because it's either written by somebody much older or someone who's lost a spouse or it's a memoir of some kind. And what I felt like I wanted to do was provide a really clinical experience in this book that actually could say to you, like, I get that grief is a nonlinear, really messy, endless, relentless, turbulent journey. But it doesn't fly for me to say, and now you just have to sit in it and just feel what you feel forever. I can't do that. I feel like even for me and anybody who came in with anxiety or somebody who had to go back to work or had no choice, they had to go on. They were a caregiver, a caretaker parent, whatever it may be. It doesn't fly to just say feel what you feel forever.

So what I wanted to do is write a book that gave tools, that had self-reflection, that nudged people to look at their entire life as a whole and figure out together how to put those pieces back together in a way that was simple, right? My language isn't super flowery because anyone who's grieving doesn't have the brain space to like, oh, look at that beautiful metaphor. Is it beautiful? Yeah. But if you're in fresh grief, do you have it in you to put that all together? Just tell me what I need to know. Tell me how to do it. Tell me what the next step is and let's go from there.

And that may work for some people and it may not. But for me and the clients that I have in my practice, I felt like I wanted to provide as close to grief therapy with me and as close to having a sense of agency as one can have in this unpredictable, really turbulent path. So that's why I wrote it. And I really hope it helps. I hope that people can feel like they're navigating something with someone else and that they have access to it because a lot of people are either afraid of therapy or can't afford it, or they don't have a specialized therapist in their town. And so that was really the hope for me.

Sam Vander Wielen:

Yeah, that's amazing. I love that you're giving people these tools because for anyone who hasn't gone through it yet, it does feel like you're just floating a little bit. And I can tell you, after losing both parents so closely together, it very much feels like you're out, like floating in the universe. I keep saying it feels like my tether has been cut. Like I just feel like a little bit like I'm floating and I'm like, I don't kind of know. I don't have a roadmap anymore because it feels like it was all stripped. It's so bizarre. I think that's going to be so helpful too pointing people in the right direction.

Speaking of having lost both my own parents this year and running a business at the same time, a lot of the questions that I got about today and I think one of the biggest questions I even have for myself is like, how do you think that grief uniquely impacts business owners or somebody who has a very like forward facing business? And what are some of the best ways that we can navigate running our businesses while going through grief?

Gina Moffa:

Yeah. I mean look, right off the bat, to me, what makes it so hard is that you don't really have the luxury of grieving. For a million reasons, right? If you are front facing, there's expectations that people have of you. You may have clients waiting on something or you have an audience waiting for them to show up, you know? But beyond that is financial stuff, right? Who has the luxury of not going back to work? And if you work for yourself, you don't get bereavement days, right? I say that all the time, like I'm my worst boss I've ever had. And so it makes it really hard.

But I think that we have to take a step back in a way and say, okay, if I know I have to go back to work and I don't have the luxury to take a month off and go to a nature retreat and wail in the woods like I think I daydream about sometimes, as somebody who also has gone through grief, I think, okay, so what can we start with? What can we actually do for ourselves that's both loving, caretaking and also showing up? Because unfortunately, we do, and I praise the people that can actually step away from their businesses and take that time and be able to come back. Most of us can't.

So I always say sort of if we -- what we need to do is sort of boil it down, right? We can't really do that five-year plan right now. We have to do the five day a week plan. Like, so what do we do? Let's look at this week ahead. First, accept that we won't get it all done, especially in fresh grief. If we could adjust our expectations of who we are and what we have to offer, especially in those first six months of losing people who are significant, that helps us because I think we have no choice, because we're exhausted. Our productivity is going to be less. We're not going to have the brain space to do the things that we did before. So we have to adjust our expectations right off the bat.

Monday morning, you're going to have to like start an hour later maybe, or maybe you aren't going to get the things done that you put on your calendar. So don't put them on your calendar, right? Really try to accept that you're not going to get it all done. I also think that because we all work from home these days, we get stuck in this bubble where we're grieving, living and working. And I think there's a lot of like power in changing our scenery. So if you can't get another place to work or rent a place to go, I always say, just take more breaks, take walks outside. You live in a place with a pretty lawn, which I see.

Sam Vander Wielen:

Yeah, very lucky. Yeah.

Gina Moffa:

You are. And I'm always like, oh, I wish I was over there in that backyard, you know? So it's like for me, like, go out there, put your feet in the grass, like sit in the sun for a little while. Make sure that you're scheduling so many more breaks in your day than you normally would do because you're not the same person with the same energy level. You're going to need these distractions and you can't just grieve, work, eat, grieve, work, eat, sleep. Like we're not babies and that we don't just poop, eat. But it feels like that sometimes. Like our life is like, okay, I cry. I take care of pragmatic things. I go to sleep and then I eat. But we have to take those breaks if you can do it, whatever way you possibly can.

I think at the end of the day, we also have to ask for a lot of help because whoever you have around you, delegate or ask for more help, let

them know for the next six months, I'm going to need a little bit more heavy lifting from you because, obvious reasons. I'm not in a place I can. If you can't have that, if you can't hire an affordable virtual assistant, if there's anyone around you, ask for help however you can because it's endless, the work.

Sam Vander Wielen:
It really is.

Gina Moffa:
I mean I could keep going, you know, but.

Sam Vander Wielen:
These are really helpful. I mean, your tips are really matching like my all I can. I'm obviously no expert at all. I'm just saying from my experience, like there was a lot of pruning that went on, I think to your point of just being like, I can't do this. I think grief has a very interesting way, specifically when you own your own business of like shining a light on what you're doing and being like, this has got to go. This thing I'm doing over here is not worth my time. There's no return on investment. Or this friend only ever contacts me for questions. They don't really add to my life. Like, I can't keep giving. Right.

And like I interviewed a burnout expert yesterday, Emily, that will be airing in a couple of weeks, but I was saying to her that I think it shows you that you have less to give. That's like my only way of putting it. It's just like I just have zero Fs to give anymore. And so I set my boundary and I very kindly tell people like, I'm sorry, I can't do that. Or I got asked to be on a podcast the other day, I referred them to my friend. And I was just like, I just don't have the bandwidth. And if people are mad, if people are disappointed, luckily, I have zero Fs to give. That's just how I feel.

Gina Moffa:
Yeah. I mean, but that is called survival care. Right.

Sam Vander Wielen:
Welcome to survival.

Gina Moffa:

It's not self-care. Like we're past that. We have to survive. I call it survival care because that's really, at the end of the day, what it is when you're in this place and you have -- it does, like loss rearranges your whole life and it basically does shift around your priorities. You're not going to look at everything the same way anymore because, number one, you can't.

And number two, because everything just got real, you're looking at this lane where you're like, wow, it actually is life or death. And I want things in my life that have meaning. I don't want to waste time anymore, right? Or just always thinking about time after loss. Like, what do I do with my time? Who do I share my time with? How do I use my time for what I know I have to do, but also what I need to do for me? Because grief takes endurance, and you can't, like you will burn out the fastest you can't even imagine if you're just saying yes to everything and you're not taking any time to actually, like, feed yourself and survive. You just won't.

Sam Vander Wielen:

It really changes you. And I think like that -- so the way that grief changes you then I think is very interesting when you're running your own business, because something that we're all very used to in the kind of like coaching consulting space is that you share a lot of yourself as you go through your day, your week, your month. And I found it particularly strange, and I noticed that a couple people asked this in the questions was like, how do you share parts of yourself in your business as you're changing? I mean, it's an evolving situation, right?

Gina Moffa:

Yeah. I mean, look, I don't think we ever have to say to everyone like, today is a good grief day or today I laugh.

Sam Vander Wielen:

Like have a little meter.

Gina Moffa:

Yeah. I mean like, here's the grief spectrum and this is where I fall on it. But I think really to say anticipate for the next six months that this is what it's going to look like. And after that, as things shift and change, you're going to see it. You don't really have to advertise that you're changing. I think, look, when you have a priority shift or you have different goals, you just say what the goals are. I don't think we have to say because of my loss, I feel like this project is no longer speaking to who I am as a person, or this friendship no longer speaks to me.

It's like, I don't think we have to make an announcement. But I understand why it feels that way because it's so monumental within us that it feels like we want people to know, and we want to share it. But I think we don't have to share the changes as much as what those changes result in. So like even just to say over the course of this month, I re-evaluated X, Y and Z, and this is what my offerings will be, or I'm pivoting in my business, and this is what -- this is where I'm headed. I don't know that we need to say I've had a really hard six months and whatever. I think people, if they know you and they care and they're invested in who you are and your business or their clients, they're going to know what's happened.

And I think it's the responsibility of society to say, listen, like when people are grieving, do better. Don't come at them in three weeks, expecting them to give like everything that they would have given before. We have to do better as communities. And that's really another part of why I want to bring grief to the conversation so much is we really have to adjust our expectations as people on the outside of grievers too. We have to adjust ourselves as grievers of our expectations of ourselves and others around us and what they can give us. But it's got to be the other way around, too.

And to say, okay, I know that she's gone through -- I know Sam has had a really shit year of major trauma and caretaking and loss upon loss upon loss. And she still shows up for us. I'm going to take what she gives. I'm going to offer what I can offer in return as support and whatever she comes forth with now, I'm going to actually know that it's a result of this because grief changes us irreversibly.

Sam Vander Wielen:

Right.

Gina Moffa:

For the better, I think in a lot of ways.

Sam Vander Wielen:

It feels like it. I mean, yeah. And it does feel like that reshifting of your priorities. Like I just think that it makes a lot of -- and maybe this is in the earlier grief days, but it makes a lot of things feel so much less important. But I was reading something you had written recently about languishing. And then I was thinking like, how do you differentiate between a shift in your priorities and saying, like, this stuff's not that important to me anymore versus like, am I just languishing and letting this thing float? Like, how do you tell the difference?

Gina Moffa:

Because I mean languishing to me is like actually across the board, there's nothing there. Right? And I do believe that languishing is, and I don't believe in stages of grief, but I think it's one of the phases of grief. At least for a short period of time, that you will go through this time where nothing matters because you don't have the capacity for it energetically or emotionally or psychologically. And especially with you coming off of caretaking, coming off of worrying, coming off of taking care of everybody, I mean if you weren't languishing, I would be worried about you.

Sam Vander Wielen:

Yeah, right.

Gina Moffa:

In a way, because --

Sam Vander Wielen:

Yeah. Maybe it's surviving like you said.

Gina Moffa:

But it is because we can't expect that we're going to find enthusiasm for everything. I don't believe that that's what it is. So for me, the languishing is across the board and I do believe it's a phase of grief.

What I think is interesting to look at is if across the board you never -- and how I compare that to grief and early stages of grief, at least, is that you never feel good about anything and that you don't feel excited, you don't feel -- and look, we don't expect you to feel excited. But if you don't feel motivated to get up, if you don't feel motivated to talk to the people who love you, to me it's that like I'm just going to sit back, and I can't even lift my arm. And that is a time that most likely after some time would need support, right?

Sam Vander Wielen:

Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Gina Moffa:

But that's not a forever thing. Most of us are able to get up and do things or see people who love us or cook dinner, you know?

Sam Vander Wielen:

Yeah. Yeah. It just feels like it takes so much effort. Like that's what you notice, right? Like that shift in how much energy? I was glad you mentioned caretaking. And so for anybody who's not familiar, my dad had leukemia. And so on the one hand, I had the benefit of knowing my dad was sick for a while, and on the other I took care of him. So that was very difficult, both financially, like physically, the whole thing. So it was a lot.

But I remember at the time feeling like I was grieving. I couldn't really label it at the time because I didn't know what grief felt like. Obviously, I hadn't lost a parent but I couldn't find a lot of support or even like sympathy from other people about what I was going through because they would be like, he's still here, enjoy it, you know? But in my mind, I knew my dad had a terminal illness. There was no coming back from this. It was only a matter of time. It was very, very difficult to live that way. I would not recommend it to anyone.

And so I just would love for you to speak to anyone. I know I have a lot of people who reach out to me who say they're in a very similar situation as to what I was in then. And I guess too, because you're so good at speaking to people who maybe aren't being recognized by the traditional grief

community and some of the things that they could be doing now, I guess, to take care of themselves.

Gina Moffa:

Yeah. I mean, first and foremost, I think it's really important to understand that there is such a thing as anticipatory grief. And so when you get a diagnosis that shifts your life and it's a terminal diagnosis, you are thrust into grief whether or not you like it because you are already knowing there's an end date. And that to me is grieving. So already you've been in the grieving process. It changes shape, right?

But I think it's important for people to know that what they experience in a full body experience, which is you're going to be sick, you're going to be tired, you're going to have headaches. You may be -- your immune system may go down and you may catch a cold for a lot longer, that it's really, really important to have all hands-on deck in taking care of your physical body during this time. And at least having a support system, either peer support colleagues, a therapist, a coach, a support group or good family. Sometimes family is not so good because they're going through something similar maybe, and so they may make it sometimes about them, whatever it is.

But having -- I kind of always say like shrink your world down. When your world changes, changes shrink your role down and really make sure that first you're taking care of your body. Like we don't, when we're grieving, anticipatory or otherwise caretaking or otherwise, we don't drink enough water. And I know it's so dumb and simple to say make sure you're drinking water.

But even in my own grief, as a grief and trauma therapist, I wasn't drinking enough water. I mean, I wound up really sick all the time. And it's something you really don't think about like, oh, I'm not hungry, but I should eat. I'm not getting any protein. Why am I always so tired? I can't sleep. I have no libido, whatever it may be. Making sure that we include our body first and foremost seems like, it seems so obvious, but I would guarantee that we are people, especially if we're businessowners, we keep going and keep going and keep going and keep going.

And so that's why I'm going to remind you, you are still experiencing anticipatory grief. It is grieving. And what I would tell you is shrink your world down to the people who are there, the support that is there for you, the things you can do, your expectations of yourself and drink the damn water.

Sam Vander Wielen:

Yeah, water is so important. And then if you're crying all the time like I was, it was just getting worse. So you definitely need your water. I think that's so helpful for -- I hope it's helpful for people to hear, to like really name it, I think and kind of own it and not let other people tell you like that that's not what you're going through or something like that.

I remember finding it like particularly weird too, to navigate that, in case anyone else is in this situation that I remember thinking like when my dad got diagnosed that he would be the person I would have normally talked to about this. So then that was really weird too. And then I also felt like I couldn't -- I didn't want to let him know quite like how badly it was hurting, and I wanted to remain positive for him. Yeah. And he had a lot of hope, even though I understood that that was not reality. And I wanted to respect that. But I've heard from other people that it's like, how do you maintain that relationship with your loved one while you know that this is happening. It's so difficult. I found it very hard.

Gina Moffa:

It is really hard. I mean, I went through the same thing when my mom was dying. She was the person to. So I really, really get it. And I think it's -- if we're going to name things, that's more secondary losses and compounded losses because we're losing our friend, we're losing our parent, we're losing our confidant, and support system. And we're in a way faking it. Right? Because we feel like we have to.

But I also feel like there isn't room necessarily to -- I think it's okay to say, I'm going to miss you, like this is hard for me and I love you and this is the hardest thing I've ever gone through. And also, I'm still rooting for you the same way you are, you know? But also, that's when I always say kind of like in a workplace that we need a safe place to be honest and to let it out and dump it out and vent outside of that. Right. I

say outside of the workplace, have a safe place because chances are you won't be able to talk to your boss about your grief.

And I feel the same way in this situation. If we can't talk to the person because of a million different reasons or not wanting to rain on their parade too of hope, then we need to 100 percent have a safe, supportive space outside, whether it's the IG community even. We have a really great grief community on IG. Whether it's IG, whether it's a Facebook community group, which I just started actually this week.

Sam Vander Wielen:

That's cool. Congrats. We can link to it.

Gina Moffa:

I'm waiting for people to join it, right? It's like you have a party and you're like, oops, I forgot to tell people.

Sam Vander Wielen:

I'll be there.

Gina Moffa:

I forgot to tell people it's there. But having a community of any sort where you can just say today was a shit day and I was watching my person feel hopeful or got a good test result, but we know it's temporary and I'm just beside myself because it's like we're just always waiting for that shoe to drop. And living in that sense of fear and anticipatory grief and knowing that you're losing more than just this person, you're losing everything that person represents, that is a lot. That's a lot to take on. That is huge, huge piles of different layers of grief.

And so, please, if there's any community, if your friends don't get it, and if they haven't lost someone, chances are they won't ever really get it. So I always say talk to somebody who does get it. And before Instagram, I would have thought or I could have said, there aren't many communities out there for people who are younger than 50 or 40 who've lost somebody. But now I'm seeing so many more people coming together, forming communities in their 20s and 30s, and I think that's so promising. And I'm like, you got

to join one of them and make sure that you're connecting with people who get you.

Sam Vander Wielen:

Yeah, absolutely, for sure. And I guess being vulnerable and open and sharing part of what you're going through, the benefit was that I had a lot of people reach out who were like, hey, I'm going through the same thing. And those people became friends and they were really cool to be able to lean on as this was all going on. So I'm really appreciative that you shared that.

I want to make sure that I get to the people's questions that they submitted on Instagram because people had really good questions. I was trying to go through and narrow them down so that I kept you like on time. And I was like, shoot, these are all really good. So someone asked, I'm going to combine two questions because they're kind of similar. And someone asked, why does grief make you so tired and what can we do about it? And then someone asked, Where does grief stay in the body? But I can really relate to the tired part, so I'm very curious about that one.

Gina Moffa:

Yeah. I mean, like I said earlier, we don't recognize so often we think of grief as just an emotional response to loss. But grief is a full body experience. I mean, I will not mince words. It is a full body experience. It affects our nervous system. Right. So remember that your nervous system is always scanning for danger. That's its only job. Your brain is scanning for danger and it's a smoke alarm, right? So when you've gone through loss, it's in a place where it's trying to recalibrate a lot of different things. Are you safe? Who else will you lose? What else will you lose? How will you get it back together? Right. Everything feels like a danger.

Beyond that, your brain is also saying, okay, I know that this person is not where they are predictably always, where they have always been. And now my brain has to get used to the fact that they are no longer in space and time. But I also have to keep a connection to them. That's very hard work for the brain. And what we don't recognize or appreciate is how much energy that takes. We're trying to keep ourselves, right? Because a lot of it we don't recognize. It's not that we're thinking, oh, my nervous system is

really active today. We get up and maybe we'll say, I'm anxious. I don't know why. Right?

Yeah. Grief gives us anxiety. We forget that grief -- I mean, grief is anxiety too. And there's so much fear associated with grief. All of that takes energy and output from our bodies. And that is in addition to the ways that it affects every one of our physical systems. So like I said earlier, your immune system is now compromised. Your heart may be different. Your blood pressure may be higher. There's so many different things happening in changes in your physiological response. And a lot of the time, and I talk about this in my book, I call it the biology of grieving, because we don't often associate grief with physical endurance and physical symptoms.

But you are tired because your entire body filled with all 12 systems is working overtime. And that's why I say it's really important to stay nourished, to get out and walk, to make sure that you're resting. If you aren't someone who could sleep well during grief, just make sure that your body is lying still, and you can really rest your whole body. It's so important that we, like I just said before, shrink down. But also remember that being an active participant in your grief means really making sure that your physical symptoms are being recognized, whatever they may be, and especially anxiety. So that was a long-winded answer to your question.

Sam Vander Wielen:

No, it's really good. I think it's really good. I think it'll be very helpful because I do think that's one of the more surprising parts of grief. And people like expect the crying and stuff like this, but how it stores in your body. It feels to me like the programs that are running on your computer in the background that like you don't know that they're running, you're not even thinking about it, but they're taking battery from your computer or like storing energy. That's kind of how it feels to me. It's like even when I'm not actively sitting there thinking about them or missing them, it's still running. It's still zapping my energy.

Gina Moffa:

I swear you just read from my book without knowing it.

Sam Vander Wielen:

Really?

Gina Moffa:

I said that exact thing. I say that exact thing that it's a tab running in the background and it's always there taking your energy.

Sam Vander Wielen:

That's how it feels.

Gina Moffa:

Quoted from my book. I love it.

Sam Vander Wielen:

That's so funny.

Gina Moffa:

But it's true.

Sam Vander Wielen:

Yeah, it's very true. Right. And I guess to that point then someone had asked how do we actually work through grief and not bury it instead? So I thought was a very good question because I know a lot of people keep saying like, you have to heal, you should work through it. And a lot of times, those terms can mean like they just feel a little floaty to people sometimes. Like, what does that really mean in practice?

Gina Moffa:

I think it means showing up to your experience, however it shows up, right? And that's also kind of vague. But like if you need a day to or you need ten minutes to go and cry or you need sometimes even to schedule it in your life, somehow you know that you show up to it. And also, that you take care of everything that you need to take care of in terms of, like I just said, you're showing up to be present with your physical sensations and whatever's coming up physically for you that you're talking about it with people who love you, that you are acknowledging that whatever the grief is and however it's showing up in your life, that you have these feelings when you have them. Knowing that anniversaries will come, grief triggers will be

there. You will be reminded all the time and really how to show up for those things.

And what it is, is because you can't really prevent it because it comes out of a surprise. Right? You can't prevent it until it happens, these triggers or these awakenings. But I think working with grief in general is looking at your whole life as a whole because you're more than the sum of your loss. It's how your loss fits in your life. All of that is grief work, right? It's just being present and honest to the fact that you've had this significant loss. Here's how it shows up. Here's how I meet it. Here's how I don't meet it. Here's how I numb out to it. Here are the people in my life that support it or don't support it. These are the boundaries I now have or need because of it. Here's how it's affected my whole life. Here's how I show up to work. Here's how I show up in a relationship, and because grief infiltrates all of that.

So really, it's a hard question to answer because it's different for everyone and how it shows up for people. But I think being honest about how it is showing up and doing your best not to necessarily run away from it, it's okay to distract yourself when it's too much, but to just find the awareness that this is what's coming up for you in this moment because it will shift every hour.

Sam Vander Wielen:

Yeah, absolutely.

Gina Moffa:

I mean, not every hour, but it feels like pretty often.

Sam Vander Wielen:

Yeah. Absolutely. Yeah. And so someone asked how you feel less lonely in your grief even when you have great people around you. I thought that was a really good question.

Gina Moffa:

Yeah. That one makes me sad. Because you know what, the truth of the matter is my answer is not a pleasant one. It is lonely. And we have to actually sort of accept that it will be lonely and there will be times that we have

to be with ourselves and put our hand on our heart and say, what do I need? And it may be a cookie or it may be taking a walk or whatever it is. And sometimes we have to give ourselves the thing. And that alone can be so lonely.

But because no one will ever really understand our loss, because no one was ever inside of our attachment to whatever it is we've lost or whomever we've lost. No one will ever really be able to understand. And so that is the existential loneliness of grief. It just is. And I think we have to -- there's no real tip for that. Especially if you have good people around you, because we can be surrounded by people in our lives without grief and still feel lonely.

But when we're in the midst of one of the most painful, difficult things we've ever gone through, I think you have great people around you, but can you talk to them all the time? Can you share everything you need to share? Do they understand where you are some days? Do you know what your needs are? Right? Tell me, Sam, how many days do you not know what it is you need, but you know you need something? Some days we want to be alone. And then the minute we're alone, we wish that we were around people. And when we're around people, we feel alone. So the loneliness of grief is probably one of the greatest mysteries of it, because there isn't really a tip for it. There's no real way through it except being fully present with that sensation and acknowledging it.

Sam Vander Wielen:

Yeah. Yeah, totally. It's very lonely. I find it to be a very lonely process even when people around you are trying. And so, I feel like it's helpful too. I try to recognize like they're trying, people mean well, all of those things. But my friend Chris, who unfortunately lost her mom as well, she always says like grief feels to her like get away from me, why aren't people here? And I was like, I've never identified with something more. She says, like, stop talking to me, why aren't you contacting me? And it's like, that's how I feel.

Gina Moffa:

So true.

Sam Vander Wielen:

It's a really weird brain screw. It's just very, very strange.

Gina Moffa:

Yeah. I write about that, too. I have a whole thing, the delicate tango of grief I call it, because you don't really know how to dance with it.

Sometimes we don't want to.

Sam Vander Wielen:

Yeah, exactly. One of my customers asked me, she said, how do you share with people that it's okay to still be grieving after the funeral? I've ran into this where people like I remember six months, nine months after my dad died, people would be like, still, still you're having trouble with that? Like, it's like a bad back or something. I was like, seriously?

Gina Moffa:

I know. So I mean, you know what? This is another one of those things where I'm like, people are just --

Sam Vander Wielen:

Not equipped.

Gina Moffa:

Not equipped. And this is where I say like, this is why I have such a mission of making grief more literate for people. Because the truth is, is number one, people don't know what to say. People don't know how to say it. So either people say the wrong thing sometimes meaning well, or they disappear totally from your life. And then there are the people -- and I had a very similar experience being really sick and having my doctor say like, well, how long has it been since your mom died? And I'm like, oh, a couple of weeks or whatever. He's like, oh no, you're good, you know?

And it just, to me is proving over and over how grief illiterate we are. But I think being able to say, I'm still grieving. And there's these -- actually someone I know, Annie Horton, I'll connect the link. She has these little pins that they'll say, I'm grieving. So sometimes and I say this in my book, I wish that I could have that little sticker that people wear on those silent retreats that says, shh, I'm in meditation, or I'm in silence.

Like I could say I'm still grieving and just put a sticker on so people just back away.

But I think that unfortunately, we either have to say like, dude, I'm still grieving, or my parents just died, or we have to just say or we say nothing, really. But the truth of the matter is, is that people need to do better. And I would always say, bring those people to me. You know, like I always say, if you love someone who's grieving or you're friends with someone who's grieving, do yourself a favor, be a good friend and learn about grief.

And even in my book, I have a little section that's like, hi, guys, it's Gina. This is for you. The person who's loving or supporting or being friends with somebody who's grieving, let me help you do better. Here are the things that you should say. Here are the things you shouldn't say. Here's how you can show up. Here's what you shouldn't do. And because I do think that people are dense enough that they need actual instructions when it comes to grief. And my hope is one day we do better.

But the truth is, is sometimes we do have to say, I'm in grieving. I'm still grieving. It hasn't been that long. I'm still grieving, period. And leave it there and let them feel dumb. Otherwise, we can wear it on our shirts, which is not shame. It's honor that we loved and connected enough to be in a state of grief.

Sam Vander Wielen:

Absolutely. Yeah. I feel like grieving so much in the last year has also gotten me really comfortable with this concept of like it's okay for people not to understand. Everybody doesn't have to understand me, and everybody doesn't have to get it or agree with me or know where I'm at. Or if they think it's weird, cool, I don't really care. And maybe it's the Scorpio in me who's a little feisty, but a lot of times when people say that to me who haven't experienced this yet, I do kind of think like, that's okay. They'll understand one day. Like they'll get it. And I kind of have -- I try to give them some grace, but also think like they'll get it. And that just kind of lets me discharge the -- because I felt offended by certain friends or something maybe, but then they haven't been through this at all. And you're like, yeah, you'll get it one day.

Gina Moffa:

It's really loving of you.

Sam Vander Wielen:

I try. This is my non-Scorpio.

Gina Moffa:

I was going to say, it must be your Cancer side. Somewhere in there.

Sam Vander Wielen:

I'm an Aquarius rising or something, so maybe they're nice. I don't know.

Gina Moffa:

Oh, yeah. I'm sure that they're lovely, you know? But it's hard. It's so hard. And a lot of people won't have that type of grace or that patience to be like, yeah, it's okay. You don't get it right now, but you will. That's generous of you. As opposed to feeling the grief of like, wow, no one understands where I am. That's your own grief right there. And to then instead be like, I just need to be with people who get it.

Sam Vander Wielen:

Yeah, absolutely. But yeah, being with people who get it -- oh, sorry. Go ahead, Gina.

Gina Moffa:

No, no, no, go ahead. I was just going to say, it's being with people who get it sounds easier than it is, but it is. It is probably the most lifesaving thing with grief. It is the thread that keeps you tethered to something.

Sam Vander Wielen:

Yeah, absolutely. And I guess because everybody's grief always feels so unique to them too, like working on that validation piece that we don't need other people to accept our grief or see our grief, it's like I'm well aware of what's going on. I don't need you to see it in me in order for it to be real, right?

Gina Moffa:

Yeah. Well, people love to tell you what you're experiencing.

Sam Vander Wielen:

Oh, I know. Yeah.

Gina Moffa:

And how do we experience it better?

Sam Vander Wielen:

Yeah. I love the just keep busy comments. I'm like, if only that did it, that would be helpful.

Gina Moffa:

Oh, my God. Who says that to you? Send them my way.

Sam Vander Wielen:

Yes, people. You would be very upset to hear who has said this to me. Yeah. Yeah. Not good. I know. Well, with that, we'll send everyone Gina's book Who's Been Bad to You. And you can send everyone the copy. Will you share with everybody where they can find your incredible book and how to get in touch with you, learn more from you, all of the things?

Gina Moffa:

Yeah. In fact, I was just going to say join the community on Facebook. It's called Moving On Doesn't Mean Letting Go, which is the title of my book on Facebook. But also my books are available anywhere you feel comfortable buying books. And I feel really, really strongly about creating a safe community. And I know I can't define what feels safe for people, but a place where people can just be with their grief and have it cared for, seen, witnessed, accepted and loved in a way. Right? We need that tenderness. And so you can find me on Instagram at @GinaMoffaLCSW. Say hello. If you have any questions, please shoot me a DM and I will do my best to get it to you. I don't want this to just be a podcast of information. I really, really, really fucking care.

Sam Vander Wielen:

I know you do.

Gina Moffa:

I have to say it that way. I really care about making grief something where people can feel like they're taken in in some way and that they're not alone in it. And yeah, that's basically it. So I would love to stay in touch.

Sam Vander Wielen:

Yes, absolutely. Go join Gina on Instagram because her Instagram is a treasure trove of information and it's so, so helpful. And obviously, go buy her book. And I know someone had asked about like continuing your loved ones legacy through your business. And I just want to say before we go that you are honoring your mom so much by taking what you went through and helping so many people. So you have so much to be proud of. I know I'm sure she is --

Gina Moffa:

Thank you so much.

Sam Vander Wielen:

Beaming from that perspective. So I just so appreciate that. And for everybody listening, make sure you hang on. I'm going to share my top takeaways from my episode with Gina after this. But thank you so much, Gina, for being here today.

Gina Moffa:

Thank you, Sam. And thank you for sharing you. And let's do this again at some point. Let's do a part two.

Sam Vander Wielen:

I would love that. Oh, I wish I had so much more time to talk with Gina. So she is right in the middle of promoting her book and she is tight on time. She's a busy woman. She's making all the rounds. This is very typical when you're in these days, like right before your book comes out. And I really want to bring her back for another episode. She mentioned it right before we got off the Zoom and she said, I want to come back and do another one, but I don't know if anybody has more questions for me.

I want you to reach out to me, send me a DM on Instagram at @samvanderwielen or send me an email. Let me know, do you want me to have Gina back again? Do you have another question for her? Is there something that you want me to ask her? Please, please, please reach out to me and let me know because I would love to ask her. And so I want to make sure that it's as helpful as possible to you. Okay.

So my top three takeaways from talking with Gina, which there were many, so I narrowed it down. But I would say number one is this idea that grief doesn't equal loss only, like the death of someone. So I thought that was really interesting because I do think that a lot of people will say, like, I haven't experienced grief yet but, you know, and I thought Gina had a great point about how you actually have, right. You've probably lost friends or relationships or jobs or circumstances. There are lots of things that we lose in life. It's not just people and loved ones. And while losing a loved one is very unique and there's a permanence to it that is very difficult to navigate, I thought that that was a really helpful take on for us to start to like open up this conversation that grief doesn't equal death only.

The second takeaway I had was how much physical care of yourself came up and how important that is. So I like that Gina focuses on the basics, like she mentioned, drinking water. I'm bad at drinking water in a good day, so grief only made that worse. And I have noticed a big difference in maintaining my health with that. But also just noticing like how grief presents in the body, I for one have had the tiredness the worst. That's my number one symptom is the tiredness. I know other people have other kinds of symptoms, but I guess being aware of it is a great start and being very gentle with yourself. So I was glad that she brought that up and that we talked about that.

My third takeaway is that it's important to brush up on grief if you're somebody's support system. Or maybe you had a friend who went through this and you weren't there for them the way that you wish you would, and this is something you want to learn more about, or it's just something you want to learn more about. Like, I like that Gina brought up the idea that we should all do better and be more aware and brush up on grief and not just wait

until this happens to us and then go, oh, shoot. Right. Which is what I did.

And so I wish like looking back on it, I wish I would have learned more about grief and been a better support system to those around me. And I need to learn just because now I've lost my parents doesn't mean that I know how to support others going through it. And so learning how to be a support system as I move forward in this, when I have the capacity to do that, that is something that I just think is such a wonderful tip.

So I will include links to Gina's book wherever you can buy books down below. *Moving On Doesn't Mean Letting Go* is available wherever books are sold, please support her. She's a wonderful person and the book is incredible. And I think it would really, really help you if you are grieving as I am.

Sam Vander Wielen:

So thank you so much for listening. And I'm serious, reach out to me, let me know. Do you want me to have Gina back on? I mean even if you don't have anything else to ask or just let me know. But if you do have a question, include it so I can get it on the next episode. I'll see you in a few days.

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