



Welcome to Griefline's Courageous Conversations series, where we delve into meaningful dialogues with leaders, organisations, and members of the community, aiming to address the multifaceted impacts of grief and loss.

Today, we are having a courageous conversation with Katherine McLean, Director at the Hunter Writers' Centre, who hosts the annual Grieve Project.

Our conversation explores the multifaceted impacts of grief and loss, and how delving into personal and often difficult experiences through various creative mediums can provide a platform for reflection and healing.

**Louisa**

OK, welcome to Courageous Conversations, Katherine.  
It's a pleasure to have you here with us today.

**Katherine**

Thanks, Louise.

It's really lovely to be here.

**Louisa**

So to kick things off, we just wanted to ask around, articulating our expressions through written word can be quite therapeutic for people suffering from loss and grief.

But where does a non-writer even begin?

The process of getting the grief journey down on paper or in this year's instance with Grieve 2024, other forms of creative expression?

**Katherine**

Yeah, facing the blank page, whether you're a writer or a non writer, storyteller or not, is always, I think the most difficult, difficult thing to start

with a blank page.

Where do you go?

One of the things that I use in my personal practice is a generative writing practice, which I think is a great start, regardless of what type of storytelling you might be.

And, and essentially the rules of the generative writing practice is you, you set a timer for 7 minutes.

You you sit down with your blank piece of paper in it and your your writing tool and and you likely should have like have a writing prompt.

So I often use writing prompts from poetry that I might find which often poetry will have a an introduction.

You know, someone, some that I find really provocative could be starting with the sentence, 'I wish someone'.

And then you take that prompt and then you write for, for seven minutes and you try not to like censor yourself because all you want to do is just get your thoughts flowing.

Cause a lot of the time we block up what we're feeling, particularly when it comes to grief.

And so the idea is, is, is to, to write for seven minutes with, with whatever prompt you're using.

It could be, 'I wish someone', another one might be 'perhaps in a different time' or 'the truth is', and then you just start from there and go.

Once you've finished the generative writing practice, you can look at your words and you might go, oh, this, that sentence is really juicy.

And then you might take that sentence and, and you start again.

So it's really about how do you move from the blank page?

And it's, it's, it's very much keep writing and don't censor yourself.

### **Louisa**

It's great guidance and it's very aligned with what we suggest to help seekers when they call our helpline in terms of helping them process how they're feeling and their emotions in a different format than having a conversation with another person, such as journaling.

### **Katherine**

Yeah, really great prompts as well from a journaling perspective.

And imagine what people can create just from getting their feelings and thoughts out on paper because everybody's got, everybody's different.

Yeah.

So you're never, ever going to get the same story ever.

And, and the, the practice that I'm speaking of that you've got a timer set for 7 minutes.

And it seems like 7 minutes is such a short period of time, but it's also a magic number.

And if you can, if you kind of get stuck within that process, you just go back to the beginning and you repeat it again, which is, you know, 'I wish someone', 'I wish someone' and keep going.

But at the end of that 7 minutes, something opens up.

It's like there's come some sort of our chemical process that opens up and, and you've, you've shifted energy in your body, which I think is probably one of the most important things when it comes to grief and loss.

**Louisa**

Yeah, and quite cathartic, yeah.

So the expansion of the Grieve project to include prose, poetry and a variety of multimedia formats such as film, audio, graphic storytelling and visual imagery is exciting.

And we'll see such a variety of projects to be submitted.

What was the vision for adding this diversity to the submission criteria this year?

**Katherine**

Storytelling is such a, it's such a vast way of, in which we communicate and, and it's not just the written word and, and essentially we acknowledge that in our modern world, our contemporary world, storytelling can, it can be so many different things.

And I guess what we wanted to do was reflect our contemporary world, reflect the, the, you know, broaden the accessibility to the project.

So young people or you know, some people might not relate to words on paper, but they do relate to music or making music or making, you know, a social media video or etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, and photography.

And so what we wanted to do was open, open the concept of storytelling up to, to, to be indicative of how people communicate and how images or music can move us and shift and shift energy in us.

So it is really exciting.

It's the first year we we're just sucking and seeing and we know that, you know, in subsequent years they're going to build on it and and and I'm excited about the possibilities of where that storytelling process can go and and and the reach it can go.

**Louisa**

You know, people don't sometimes people don't read words on paper.

They'd rather listen.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, definitely why to am looking forward to seeing all the different submissions that you'll be receiving this year.

**Katherine**

I mean oral storytelling.

Yeah, oral storytelling is a, is a, is a is as old as time or as old as humans.

And, and, and there's, there's things within that as well.

So I'm looking forward to people sending in their stories spoken word, which will be fun.

**Louisa**

And yeah, definitely have opened up in terms of accessibility by allowing submissions to be submitted in that way as well.

So and it, it may actually remove a lot of barriers that maybe people in the past may have wanted to be a part of the project but didn't have the capacity.

So yeah, it's, it's really as well that you're doing.

**Katherine**

We hope so.

We hope so.

I mean, it's important that I think grief and loss is, is a shared human experience.

And it's important that we can all, you know, engage in that conversation.

## **Louisa**

Yeah. Yeah, for sure.

So when the Grieve Project was launched, it made a big impact. And and that has grown over the last 12 years. How's the concept filled a gap in the community? So, you know, like, how do you feel the Grieve Project has helped those on a grief journey?

## **Katherine**

Yeah.

Grief in our society, our Western society isn't. We don't, we don't often speak about it. We don't, you know, it's not something that we share. It's something that we often will experience in isolation. And, and when we first started the grave project, it opened something up in our, our community of writers in the Hunter region. And we understood it to be a really powerful process of expression.

And so we opened it up to to the nation. And what what's happened is it's it's reduced people's isolation in grief. It's allowed for a community conversation around grief. It's allowed for people who may be feeling very alone in their journey to not feel that alone. It's enabled people to process their own grief and know that they are they have the potential to assist another person's journey in grief.

So, so essentially it, I think for me, the biggest, the impact of it is the reduction of isolation around grief and mourning and loss, as well as building a community conversation about, about grief and loss and, and about the fact that it's a shared human, it's a shared human experience.

And that, you know, not everything is rainbows and glitter and that we need to honour on our, our, our internal experience and also feel comfortable knowing that you're not alone.

I'm not saying you have to share, sorry, I'm not saying you have to share with everybody.

And so, you know, sometimes you don't have to share with everybody. You just, you just need to process it out of your own body. But it is about, it's about, it's about acknowledging that that grief and loss is, is a shared process, a shared journey.

### **Louisa**

Yeah.

And I think it really does help as a community address stigma. And even if it's one person who realises that in the expression of their own grief through written word, and even if it's in their journal and they never submit it to a project like Grieve, that they are taking steps towards healing through that expression.

And then also hopefully being able to share that with someone else or another group of people may help them validate their own experience of loss as well when they read another person's story.

And it, it does help communities connect and, and grow collectively through the process of loss.

### **Louisa**

So in reviewing the submissions, you would be confronted, I'm sure, by many stories that you, you know, will be consuming about their individual's grief and loss.

So how do you and your team ensure self-care is top of mind?

You know, as you process and you know, read the submissions or, and I keep saying read, but with this year's submissions, so you digest, consume.

### **Katherine**

It's a great question.

And, and I think, I think it's the same process as as if you were experiencing grief and loss.

So you know, it's essentially how do you look after yourself?

For me, it's an ongoing, it's an ongoing you, you learn everyday how you do it better.

But for me, it's about acknowledging where I'm at at any particular moment.

So stopping and breathing because often times you'll just keep going. You, you just keep going and you keep pushing through and you're not acknowledging where you're at.

And so for me, it's really important to stop and recognize where I'm at in this process.

And then for me also, it's about shifting the energy out of my body.

So often things feel really overwhelming or too big or so much and, and it's almost as if your body can't contain that energy.

And so for me, it's about how do I shift that energy out of my body?

So, you know, everybody's different.

I love nature.

Like I think it's really important to be outside to breathe outside air to, to take note of the birds and the, and the, and the, the sun.

And if you've got water around you, water is really an extraordinary healing energy.

I do things like dance, you know, just to get, just to move.

Because I think it's about whatever I need to do to, to kind of find space in my body to then to then keep, keep, keep on.

Because often times if we don't acknowledge where we're at and have compassion for where we're at, then then we just keep going to, to and it, it affects us, you know, it's, it's unhealthy for us.

So I encourage my team to take breaks to, to, to share because I think community and, and relationship is also really important as well.

### **Louisa**

Yeah, yeah, for sure.

So how do we further encourage people to consider sharing their grief journey and writing or visually as a coping strategy during difficult times?

### **Katherine**

I, it's, I think it takes courage sometimes to, to, to sit in grief and, and, and it takes a lot of compassion.



Like you need a lot of compassion, compassion, compassion for yourself and, and, and, and to honour, to honour your grieving.

Like to honour that it, it's valid to honour that you, you have every right to grieve and, and to have compassion for yourself in your grieving process. I really do think that the creative expression is an extraordinary way of processing grief.

And and if you can find, if it's with a paintbrush, if it's with a pen, if it's with dancing, you know, any way that you can express yourself will assist your process or exist.

Insist, you know, spaciousness from, you know, that often can be overwhelming grief, I guess.

Yeah, Yeah, I guess.

**Louisa**

And in itself, that's an act of self-care.

**Katherine**

Yeah, Yeah.

Compassion and self-care.

We need so much more of it in our society.

**Louisa**

I agree.

I really do.

So wrapping things up, how do people enter if they've they're watching this, listening to this, and they've never heard of the Grieve Project before?

Where do they go to learn more and submit?

**Katherine**

Certainly the The Grieve Project is an initiative of the The Hunter Writers Centre.

So we have on our website a page dedicated to The Grieve Project

So if you head along Google The Hunter Writers Centre and and go to our website, you'll find all the information about the project. And if you have any questions, you can just contact us and let us know and, and we will endeavour to answer swiftly.

**Louisa**

Wonderful.

Well, thank you so much for joining us today, Katherine. It's been an absolute pleasure.

And we had a great, courageous conversation today.

**Katherine**

Yeah.

Thanks for that, Louisa.

We appreciate Griefline's work in this space.

It's it's really important work.

And thanks for having me.