

What's inside.

This is *your* Mourning Journal. An obvious statement that needs on-going emphasis. Every time you enter here, something in you is asking to be heard. Writing in your journal is a practice of listening to yourself, to the emotions you may be swimming in, around, or against. To the thoughts over-taking you or the subtle whispers that just will not leave you alone. When you open your journal, you are nodding “yes” to yourself. With every written page, you are respecting your reality and growing closer to knowing your grieving soul. “Know thyself.” This sage directive was carved on the front of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi in the 4th Century B.C.E. On the front of the temple! These ancient advisors did not stress numbing ourselves, distracting or disregarding ourselves. But knowing ourselves. In this time of grief, may your Mourning Journal be of tender help.

There are over 52 images of art with accompanying texts and questions in this Mourning Journal site. If you choose to, you are provided one image a week, for one year to work with. But only you can decide your pace through grief. You may feel the need to write in your journal twice a week or once a month. Whatever pace you take is your necessary rhythm. I started out looking and writing once a week and soon began to rely on this journal not only to unburden but, surprisingly, for stimulation. I have learned boredom can also be hidden in grief.

Choosing an art image.

There is no chronology to these entries. You may start on the first page and proceed from there. The artists and their artworks are numerically listed so you can also randomly pick one by choosing a number. Or you can look at a few art pieces until you feel a response surfacing that

nudges you to explore. My advice is to peruse only two or three works at a time, then choose the one that brings up a thought, an emotion, a memory, even if subtle. I am inclined to go the synchronistic route: pick a page or number *randomly*. So often I have been astonished at the pointed resonance in the chosen artwork. This wisdom-in-the-randomness has influenced in me a greater trust in the unfolding of life in general, the mysteries of the unseen. I hope you will opt to employ synchronicity at least every so often to experience the uncanny “coincidence” that awaits you.

****First Question First** Guide Sheet.**

Under the “Resources” tab you will find ****First Question First****. This is your step-by-step assistance through the process of listening to your response while looking at art, then writing through your grief. It is meant to be printed out and to accompany you each time you open your journal. It will act as your reminder that this process is yours entirely, your expression, your revelation. Its message is, “Listen to yourself and respect what you hear.”

Author’s text.

I recognize that this process of looking at art and listening to your subtle responses may be new for many. And journal writing itself may be a strange room to enter. I offer my own responses and questions to consider as encouragements going forward, not to take the place of your own reactions (using the ****First Question First**** guide sheet), but as assistance whenever you need any. The more you look, the more you see. And the more practice you will garner in listening to those quieter murmurings asking to be explored. Please note that these

writings are one person's experience in the context of her life, her way of seeing life, her sensibilities. Some entries will bend towards the academic (you can take the teacher out of the classroom, but . . .), others towards the spiritual, social, psychological. Art suggests. And the conversation begins. There is no one "right" way. I hope you will find these responses and questions useful along *your* way.

Excerpts from my journal.

Interspersed among these pages are excerpts from my own Mourning Journal. Yes, it makes me nervous to share them. No, I do not make a habit of this. My experience of what has helped insists on me taking this vulnerable action. As I have mentioned, reading books on grief has been my constant. Even if I only open the book once a week, it is a signal to myself that this state I am in is real, difficult, and needs care. And I've noticed that when an author delves deeper into their own grief details, unabashedly sharing the behind-closed-doors truth of it, I especially feel soothed. I am no longer the lone inhabitant in this strange land of loss. I feel better. So, I am ignoring my nausea, and offering you moments of raw, untidy, at times almost stream-of-consciousness writing from a broken heart. In the hopes that you will feel less alone in your land of loss.

Note, the quality of these excerpts model journal writing as well, in their half-formed thoughts, repetitive vocabulary, mixed metaphors. Unedited release is the goal. Remember, only you will read this . . . unless you give permission otherwise.

Finally, I have decided *not* to enter these excerpts in chronological order. The suggestion of a linearity or developmental grief process rings false. As I have often read, the spiral staircase image may represent the

movement of grief more accurately, coming and going, repeating, growing less “acute” as time goes on, but never coming to a final stop. This image has come closer to my grief experience. So, my journal entries can be read as any moment on that spiral, as grief came over me, wave at a time, in its own time.