

**AoD FEEDBACK GRIEF ASSIGNMENT And MISCELLANEOUS**  
**3/1/06**

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--, you always tackle the toughest questions. You are a really remarkable person. Even with your brave comment in class, I was totally unprepared for where this poem went. Pit Ponies and Military Working Dogs! Ouch. As I read these descriptions, what I hear is an overwhelming sense of being trapped, being imprisoned in “stygian darkness,” with the only release being death. This would be a terrible, an unacceptable and intolerable fate. I am almost certain that you will see things differently in 4<sup>th</sup> year, but that is a long ways off. In the meantime, I wonder what can help restore even a modicum of freedom. Remember that Rumi quote I’ve shared, “Why stay in prison when the door is so wide open?” Can I help you figure out how to open the door, even a crack? I do not like to think of you in prison. You know I’m always available for a cup of coffee if that ever sounds good. Take care, Dr. Shapiro

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Thank you so much for these reflections about your grandmother, her final sickness, and her death. It affected me deeply because, as you may know, I am also a grandma and also fighting cancer. My 4 grandsons are little (ages 1-4), but even now I am very sad when (because of side effects of my medications), I can’t rough-house with them as I used to, or run with them, and don’t have the endurance to watch them for more than a few hours. Your essay really made me understand how hard it is for kids to understand these changes. However, reading your essay also made me grateful for the time I have with these little guys, and made me realize how happy I’d be to be with them when they’re twelve, no matter what limitations I might have. --, I hope you can let go of that guilt that you acted like a 12 year old kid, rather than a mature adult, just because you *were* twelve. I know it sounds corny, but write your grandma a letter. Let her know how much you miss her, how you understand things now that you didn’t then. I would like to believe as well that somehow her soul/spirit/essence knows and rejoices at the good person you are and the good you will do in your life – as a kind, feeling surgeon ☺. Best, Dr. Shapiro

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--, I am very sorry to learn of the death of your young cousin, although it occurred many years ago. As we discussed in class, these griefs change and evolve over time, but they do not disappear. Nor should they, because in a way they are a testament to the love and caring we will always carry for those we love. I was especially struck by the difficult task you had to assume, in a sense mediating between your family and the hospital culture. I know this was a gift of love you gave to them, yet the responsibilities of this role can sometimes impede or complicate your own grieving process. Being the strong one, the competent one, the more formally educated one doesn’t always leave much room to express your own vulnerability and suffering. I hope that you were able to take care of yourself as well. Thank you for sharing, Dr. Shapiro

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I appreciated the way you presented the death of this particular patient in class, with the emphasis on some of the limitations of your team in dealing with loss and grief, and the compensatory healing that occurred when your attending was able to validate your feelings and facilitate your own grieving process. Then, when I read your essay, I realized that there was a whole dimension of guilt as well, because of the possibility that the hospitalization meant to help, and perhaps save, this little girl likely contributed or even caused her death. You know, you say, hindsight is 20/20, but I'm not sure this is so. It is impossible to predict alternative futures. This outcome I think should engender humility, but not guilt. Buddhists say that even the best, most well-intentioned actions generate some "dust" (some unintended negative consequences; and similarly, even evil actions sometimes produce good). In this case, despite trying to do good for this child, the end result was tragic. What can we really conclude from this? I think only that we can do the best we can, but we cannot guarantee the outcomes, and when we act as if we can, we do all those affected a great disservice. I know it sounds corny, but think about writing this little patient a letter. Explain to her you meant her no harm, only wanted to do good, and are so sorry about how it all turned out. I think she'll understand. Best, Dr. Shapiro

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--, thank you for sharing the story of your grandfather. This was a kind of loss we did not discuss in class, the gradual loss of a person over time, although they are still alive. In some ways, this is the most tragic loss of all, and as you say, the final death of the individual can contain an aspect of relief. I admire that although your visits with him became increasingly difficult, you persevered. I believe this was a way of honoring the personhood of your grandfather, and you are quite right in hoping that you brought him happiness as well. Just because we aren't certain of how someone is reacting to us doesn't mean they aren't reacting, so I think hope is always best. You know, sometimes when we lose someone we love, we feel additional losses as our life moves on and we are not able to share important experiences with them. Although it may seem silly, it can help to share anyway: tell your grandpa those stories, write him a letter about how wonderful it was to graduate from medical school. You might just feel closer to him. Best, Dr. Shapiro