

Wonder and Grief - by Lynne Golodner - On Being Jewish Now

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Lynne Golodner

This essay is part of a new collection of work inspired by the anthology [On Being Jewish Now: Reflections of Authors and Advocates](#). Want to contribute? Instructions [here](#). Subscribe [here](#).




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When my father was dying of leukemia, I held his soft hand and whispered, “I’m going to miss you so much.”

“I’m going to miss all of you,” he said.

Ever since he left us, I’ve wondered if there is missing where he is now. Is there longing or memory there? A clear view of this world from the next? The idea of all the people I loved watching over me keeps them close, and I can almost believe they haven’t disappeared forever. For what is life worth if not to love intensely and then seethe with loss?

When my children were little, a toy guitar used to spontaneously trill, late at night in the quiet house. It was the oddest thing. I would get out of bed to search for it, usually finding it buried under race cars, dress-up clothes and stuffed animals. I wanted to believe that it was my grandfather's spirit telling me he was still around, watching over us.

If my children were scared by the late-night noise, I told them Grandpa Artie, whom they'd never had a chance to meet, was visiting us. That made it magical.

Born six months after my grandfather died, my first baby, Asher, carries his Hebrew name, which means "joy." My son has always been a joyful person. When he was little, he would throw his arms around a tree trunk and lean close to smell the bark. For a time, he wore ties and dress shirts and fedoras to middle school. Maybe his name drew my grandfather's smiling soul down from the heavens to infuse my boy with a cheery and loving personality.

While some Jewish teachers believe that the soul keeps returning to human form until it has finished its job on earth, I have a hard time believing that my loved ones are actually hovering nearby. I wish I had that kind of blind faith, but I don't. I remember the feel of my father's papery hand, the skin translucent as he fought for breath. I wanted him to be released from pain, but I didn't want to have to live without him.

A rabbi once told me that Jews don't think about the afterlife. Some do; some don't. They're all stories, anyway, just like the one about my grandfather and the midnight guitar. Stories to comfort us when we grow itchy with not knowing.

With all that's happened to Jews in the last 16 months—and really, through all of history—I hope there is something beautiful beyond what we know. A happy place, where lost souls gather, lifted by the love of the people left behind. It's the only way I can make sense of, say, the loss of the Bibas boys and their fierce mother, whom I never knew but have thought of every day since October 7. Watching so many grieving people line the streets as their funeral caravan made its slow way to final rest, I started to believe that our love is a bridge between known and unknown, between now and the impossible beyond.

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In addition to her 11 books, [Lynne Golodner](#)'s writing has appeared in magazines and newspapers around the world. After 15 years as a journalist, she founded a marketing company to work with nonprofits, entrepreneurs and authors to build brands and market their work. She is also a writing coach and have taught writing for more than 20 years. For five years, she hosted the [Make Meaning Podcast](#), and she was a Fulbright Specialist from 2017-2020. She earned her MFA in poetry from Goddard College and a BA from [University of Michigan](#) (Communications/English). She lives in Huntington Woods, Michigan.

Instagram: [@lynnegolodner](#)
