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ENG 271

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Option 1, Short Story/ Screenplay Dialogue

Moving Through Grief

When Kristie Thomas, the thirty-one-year-old grief counselor walks into the counseling room, she has a brief flashback of when she was once sitting in a similar room after her father passed away. Now the seats are filled by other young adults who are facing similar grief. Yuki slouches in the same chair she has sat in every other week. She has been coming to grief counseling the longest. While she sits quietly, counting down the seconds until the session began, across from her sat Junior. He sits quietly, squinting with concentration as he drew in a notebook that he carries around with him everywhere.

Kristie takes a seat between Junior and Yuki, and as the clock strikes five o’clock, she begins the session. “Hello everyone, It’s nice to see you again. As always I want everyone to know that this is a safe environment. I encourage everyone to participate, but no one will be forced to share anything they aren’t ready to share. Let’s begin with how everyone is feeling today. Junior, will you start?”

Junior sits up in his chair and fixes his glasses. “I’m doing well. It was a typical high school day followed by basketball practice. We have a game tomorrow, so I’m a bit nervous, but both of my parents are going to try to make it,” Junior says with a big smile, but of course he knew that it was probably unlikely something wouldn’t go wrong like the car breaking down or a freak storm hitting.

“That's nice,” Kristie says joyfully. “How about you Yuki, how are you doing today?”

Yuki takes a deep breath before answering. “I’m feeling fine. It’s been a busy day with classes and work. I got a call from my grandmother this morning. She said she is doing well, but I’m not sure I believe her.”

“Why is that?” Kristie asks with a concerning tone.

“I think she’s still really lonely after losing my grandfather. Sometimes she sounds tired on the phone like maybe she isn’t sleeping very well. She still talks to him and my mother every day in front of the Buddhist altar.”

“Sometimes talking to those we have lost is a way for people to deal with their grief while also remembering those they have lost,” says Kristie. Yuki nods as she take in what Kristie said. “Not everyone deals with grief in the same way, and that doesn't mean it is wrong.”

Junior quickly buts in, “but there are wrong ways to deal with grief, right? I mean, on the reservation most people deal with their grief by drinking, which is ironic because about 90% of the deaths on the rez have to do with alcohol.”

“Drinking is not a good tool for dealing with grief. It is a way of avoiding the pain instead of dealing with it and finding a way to move through it. For some people, the longer they try to avoid their pain, the harder it becomes to face it. That's why in here we try to teach you better coping strategies. What I mean is that there isn’t one way to grieve. Some people need to talk it out like we do here. Others need to process it by themselves,” says Kristie. “And it may take longer for some people than others.”

“After my sister died and the initial shock wore off, all I could do was laugh.” Junior’s head drops and sadness came across his face. “I laughed uncontrollably until I just passed out. After losing my grandmother and my fathers best friend shortly before, I just think I didn’t have any more tears to shed. And then I felt so guilty. I couldn’t help but think that it was my fault my sister was dead. I was the one who left the reservation first. She had gotten married so quickly and moved away because I left first.”

A few seconds passed where no one said anything, but for Junior, it felt like hours. This was always the hardest part of the job for Kristie, watching and listening to these young adults, who have their whole lives ahead of them, share their grief and be filled with guilt. She knew from personal experience that it would take a lot of time before that guilt ever went away.

“I understand what that guilt must have felt like,” Kristie shares. “I remember thinking that if I hadn’t have gone to my friend's party, or if I had stayed the night instead of making my dad pick me up late at night, he wouldn’t have gotten in an accident.” Kristie, briefly looking at the floor, takes a deep breath before continuing on. “But, eventually I came to understand that none of it was my fault. It was an accident. Moving to a new school doesn’t mean that you are responsible for your sister's accident.” Junior’s eyes have begun to swell up with tears. Kristie places a hand on his shoulder while Yuki hands him the box of tissues. Up to this point, no one had understood what Junior was feeling. Now he was beginning to think that there was a future where he didn’t feel so much guilt, and where he allowed himself to do what was best for himself without worrying about those he left behind on the rez.

Kristie turns toward Yuki and asks if she had any similar experiences. Yuki shrugged. “I knew that my mother's decision was her own and in her note, she said that it wasn’t because of me or that she didn’t love me.” Yuki pauses to think about the questions she had after her mothers suicide. “At first I had a lot of questions. There were times where I wondered what would have happened if I didn’t wait for my piano lesson and had just gone home, or if I had noticed how unhappy she was.”

“That is perfectly normal,” says Kristie.

“I know.” Yuki smiles slightly with the corner of her mouth but is still sad thinking back to that painful time in her life. “Eventually with time I stopped asking those questions and started to wonder what my life would be like if she were still around. Maybe I would have done better in school or made more friends, I don’t know. I think one of the hardest things was everyone expected me to act and behave in a certain way.”

“What do you mean?” asked Junior who had stopped crying but his eyes were still red.

“My stepmother wanted me to pretend I was happy. She was constantly worried about what others would think or say. She wanted me to move on as if it were supposed to be simple, but I wasn’t going to pretend. At times it felt like everyone else was moving on as though nothing happened, but that was because nothing did happen to them, so no one understood. I had to make sense of everything myself.”

“Yeah, I get that. On the rez, we are all too familiar with funerals. I have been to forty-two in my short life and unless you live on a rez, it is hard to understand what that is like, to have lost so many friends, family, and neighbors. I never knew what to say when people came up to me after. I couldn’t explain what I was feeling, and how were they going to understand anyway.”

Kristie nods in agreement. “Grief and loss often have a way of making people feel isolated and alone. It can feel like no one understands. Sometimes the best thing you can do is find someone who is willing to listen or just be there. And that might be in a group like this where everyone is experiencing some sort of loss.” Both Yuki and Junior smile as they look around them at people who can understand some of what they are feeling. “It’s important to know that you are not alone. Although the pain may never fully go away, it will fade and you will be able to hold on to the good memories and the love that you shared with the people that you have lost.”

“I know that my mother wanted me to be happy and to live a full life, and I want to do that for her. She is still with me every day. I am reminded of her when I walk through gardens or when the cherry trees blossom and it doesn’t hurt as much as it used to. Instead, I feel happy to know that she will always be a part of me,” says Yuki. Kristie smiles because at that moment she knew that Yuki wouldn’t need group counseling much longer.

After the session ends and people start to make their way out, Yuki approaches Junior who is finishing a comic sketch. “Hey, nice sketchbook,” Yuki says.

“Thanks, I never go anywhere without it.”

“I have one at home that I used to carry around with me. I would draw all the clothes my mother had made me or the things we had bought that reminded me of her.”

“Comics are my way of communicating with the world in a way everyone can understand.”

“That’s cool. My father sent me my mother’s sketchbook a while back. It was full of portraits from when I was just a little girl. It brought me back to those times and I could practically hear my mother’s laughter.” Yuki smiles and thinks about those portraits now. The portraits that were drawn during a time when her mother was happy.

“My grandmother was always laughing. She traveled to about one hundred different reservations. She loved everybody and everybody loved her. At her funeral, everyone showed up. We all laughed and cried together,” says Junior as he reminisces about the positivity his grandmother brought to everyone around her.

“You know, when I went off to college, I decided to leave my hometown too.”

“Really, why? I’m sure the education wasn’t as bad as what we got at the rez.”

Yuki laughs softly at the seriousness of Junior's response. “Your right, probably not, but I knew that leaving was what was best for me and my future. I couldn’t stay with my father and stepmother any longer. I knew that I needed to start a life of my own. It isn’t a bad thing to want to do something for yourself. Don’t think that by pursuing a better education, you are somehow letting other people down. It important to take care of yourself.” Junior smiles. No one on the rez understood what had driven him to leave. Many of them felt that it was a betrayal. Junior was happy to have someone who not only understood but also encouraged him to do what was best for his future. He only hoped that someday everyone else would understand too. “Well, I guess I’ll see you next week Junior.”

“Yeah, see you next week.”

Work Cited

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