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Disenfranchised grief: What 9/11 means to me...now



Photo: [Marjan Noback](#)

I have to admit, this is difficult for me to [write](#). I lived in [New York State](#) for most of my life, so 9/11 has always carried a certain sadness for me—as it does for many of us. I remember the unfolding of events that morning like it happened yesterday: Driving to work, hearing about the first plane on "[The Howard Stern Show](#)" and thinking it was a joke, but finding out when I got to my office that it was all too real. I remember the nausea that burned and churned in my stomach as I watched the Twin Towers crash down over and over again on a continuous loop of news. I remember the weeks of shopping therapy I engaged in after the event, though I can't remember for the life of me what I actually purchased. I felt a tremendous sense of [grief](#) and sorrow for the people who lost their loved ones, though I did not have any personal connection to that date.

Until last year.

On September 11, 2008, I lost my [grandmother](#), after an entire summer of her fighting for her life. And now, a year later, my conundrum begins: As I grieve for my own loss, I feel almost petty. What is the death of one 80-year-old woman to [illness](#) compared to the loss of thousands at the hands of ideological maniacs? Surely, my pain isn't that important right now, given the much larger implications of the date that my grandmother just happened to pass away on. Am I selfish for feeling so heartbroken right now? Why do I feel so ambivalent about this in the first place?

According to Dr. Kirsti A. Dyer, my feelings are not at all uncommon. As she writes in "[The Other September 11, 2001](#)", many people who have lost [loved ones](#) on September 11 anniversaries feel a sense of disenfranchised grief—meaning that their own feelings of loss get lost in the smoke and shadow of the terrorist attacks. As a result, they feel as though they cannot publicly acknowledge their own loved ones and they must bury their personal mourning.

If you are experiencing disenfranchised grief, Dyer suggests that you first accept that your loss is personal and many people may not believe that you have a legitimate reason to be upset given the bigger picture. But of course, this acknowledgment does not ultimately make your feelings magically disappear, so she suggests that you talk to the people who care about you and find ways to privately honor your loved one—such as visiting a [grave](#) or spending time in a special place.

As for me, I'm not sure how I will be spending tomorrow—but I am going to try to grieve the loss of my grandmother without guilt. I always joke and say that she intentionally died on 9/11 because I am notoriously bad at remembering dates—and she had a quirky sense of humor. So as I write this—with great sorrow lodged in my throat and streams forming in my eyes—I honor that quirky little lady who died on a date that I will never forget.

This article originally appeared on my [Interpersonal Relationships Examiner](#) page on September 10, 2009.

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