



Book Gang Podcast Transcript: Surprising Truths About Grief With Amy Lin (Here After)

Amy Lin

Hi, my name is Amy Lin. I'm the author of **Here After**, a memoir about loss and living with grief. And I'm really excited to be speaking with you today.

Amy Allen Clark

Hey Book Gang, I want to start with a quick content warning that today we are talking about grieving and loss as we explore Amy Lin's heartfelt debut memoir, **Here After**, published this year from Zibby Books. In Rob Delaney's memoir called **A Heart That Works** about his grief over losing a child, he offered readers a nod to a

classic that you might not have thought of as a grief book. He shares my favorite historical response to someone hearing about a “big” death.

It comes from the character Henry in Mary Shelley's masterwork, **Frankenstein**. When he learns that his best friend, Victor Frankenstein's young brother, William, has been murdered, he says, I can offer you no consolation, my friend. Your disaster is irreparable. What do you intend to do? Perfect. There is no consolation. The disaster is irreparable. He shared that he read this book through his grief and considered it his companion book. It should come as no surprise, that Mary Shelley also was a bereaved mother. As a reader, not only have I now cataloged this moment, but I wanted you to be able to think about grief in new ways too, both through quotes like these and through today's moving conversation with Amy Lin. I first want to share that I have great compassion for anyone who is newly navigating loss. Friends, what we know is that this experience, it is universal, and yet we still don't always have language for how we can support grievers.

Yet in times of loss, books give words to what we hold in our hearts, and they tell us that we're not alone. I say with all honesty that rarely a month passes that we do not have a book club member posting looking for books on grief, especially as many of us are now sitting in these midlife years. I've often wanted a soft online place to land for people on the topic. And now we have that resource for you.

Whether you need a memoir to mirror your experience or a fictional protagonist who discovers their unexpected found family through this process, I have you covered with a new book list. But as I combed through those pages, I began to realize that we really had two important components to covering grief. One is the incredible books, but the other is these small, bite-sized quotable lessons, like the one that I talked about earlier, that can be contained throughout those books.

So I've created a small gathering of literary quotes about grief that deeply resonated with me and I hope will resonate with you too. If you're new here, hi, I'm Amy Allen-Clark and I'm the voice behind the Book Gang podcast. This podcast celebrates debuts, backlist books and under-the-radar book gems.

Commercial free conversations like these are made possible because of our generous Patreon community. Thank you for choosing to support human creators like me.

Every edited episode involves numerous hours, from reading and preparing for the interviews to editing the shows to paying for online subscription services to host these on a public platform. As an indie podcast, I would be so grateful if you joined our Patreon.

Now, patrons can join our book club chat this month as we dive into our second V.E. Schwab book together.

Vicious is the ultimate villain book that reads like a fantastical summer film escape. Although it is part of a duology, I feel like it can absolutely be read on its own. And I loved hearing from Denise, a book club member, who shared that **Vicious** was hands down the best book that she read this past month. She said, I never would have read this without you picking it. Totally enjoyed this complete departure from my normal genre favorites. I don't think there's a better endorsement than that.

So, I hope I'll see you at our Zoom discussion on April 26th at 8 p.m. Eastern time. Remember, the cost is only five bucks to sustain this programming and to join that book club. So that's for a whole month together. I would love to have you.

Here After is a powerful memoir of a love story that was cut short and the journey through the depths of loss and grief towards a path of healing. Amy Lynn never expected to find a love like the one she shares with her husband, Kurtis a gifted young architect who pulls her towards joy, adventure, and greater self -acceptance. But on a sweltering August morning, only a few months shy of the newlyweds' move to Vancouver, 32 -year -old Kurtis heads out to run a half marathon with Amy's family.

It is the last time she sees her husband alive. 10 days after this loss, Amy is in the hospital, navigating her own shocking medical crisis and making life-or-death decisions about her treatment. What follows is a brutally honest accounting of her life with Kurtis the void created by his death and the ongoing struggle Amy faces as she attempts to understand her own experience in the context of commonly held quote, truths about what grieving looks like.

Amy Lin is a writer and educator who lives in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. **Here After** is her first book, and I'm so proud to host today's meaningful conversation. And just to remind you, if your heart is heavy today, it's okay to come back to this, but also I think this conversation is essential for people like me who want to show up better for people like Amy. All right, let's get chatting.

I'm so happy to have you here. We were just talking earlier about how much we love Kathleen Carter, who is doing all the publicity for your book. We are also both named Amy. We both have sisters who are nurses. I feel like this conversation was meant to be.

Amy Lin

I'm really excited about it. Having nurse sisters is also such a funny job because they're so caring but also so organized in so many ways.

You don't realize how useful that is until you get older. Suddenly, you have all of these needs that nurses know how to take care of. They just know how to do everything.

Amy Allen Clark

Yeah. I don't know if my sister loves being a nurse and I'm like, hi, I have this funny rash. Can you like tell me if this is normal?

Amy Lin

That's me too.

Well, Amy, I'm excited to have you here. I wish this was a different kind of book that we were talking about today, but I want to tell you that I absolutely think this memoir is just so beautiful. And I would love for our listeners who haven't had a chance to pick up **Here After** to hear a little bit about your story and what inspired this book.

Amy Lin

So *Here After* is a memoir, but it originally started as a Substack, which is a newsletter that I still write in. I write monthly, although when I began, I wrote weekly. And the sub stack was started at the behest of my therapist who told me very shortly after Kurtis died that I needed to not grieve alone. And it's a difficult thing because I'm quite a private person. And the idea of opening up and telling

people some of, if not the most painful parts of my life felt completely impossible to me. And I told him, well, I'm just not gonna do that. And so he was like, well, what can you do?

And so we came to this idea of writing a newsletter that people could access. And that was where I was able to put what grief was like for me, the experience of it, the feeling of it. And I wrote every week for about a year. And then around a year, my agent, who I really love and trust a lot, was talking to me on the phone and she kind of asked if I thought maybe this project of the newsletter was going to be a book.

And I had not considered that, but because I always want to be my agent's favorite, I told her, yes, it's going to be a book. And then I panicked when I got the phone and I thought, oh my gosh. And I put all of the newsletter pages into Word and I thought, oh, okay, I have 110,000 words. Okay. That's a book. And then I realized that it wasn't because a project like the newsletter, which I love dearly and I love still writing in it.

It's formed in the time that it happens. But a book isn't made in the time that it happens. It's made outside of time, in the same ways that grief propels you out of time. And I spent a really long period of months wrestling with this book and eventually ended up taking thousands of words away, cutting huge portions, looking at a whole page and saying, okay, you can only keep...

Eight sentences fit in this tiny text box. The essential core of my grief experience began to reveal itself when I started to create by eliminating things. That was how I was able to access what was, for me, the heart of my grief experience. What was so important to me about **Here After** was that it reflected a mirror for how much pain people are in when they're grieving. There's so many books that are maps that try

to give you guidance in grief. And I really didn't want that when I was grieving. I wanted something that was in pain and that for me ultimately was **Here After**.

Amy Allen Clark

I feel like when I picked this book up, I had an idea of what it might be about, right? And I think that the way that the story developed, it became something else to me.

So I first want to say, I had tuned into NPR one day and was listening to an interview with a dad who had lost their child. And the interview itself, it was a little messy like she said a couple of things that were not correct. One of those things is, is this a cathartic experience for you? Did it feel healing to tell the story? Right. And he was like, no. And he started to talk about how it wasn't like that at all. You're constantly in pain.

And I remember distinctly, like I came home and I told my husband, one of the things that I really appreciated about that segment: One, it was uncomfortable. And I got to hear what not to say instead of NPR cleaning it up and being like, "Oh no." like that moment never happened. There were also a lot of really long pauses and uncomfortable silences. And I thought that from the standpoint of seeing and witnessing someone grieving, I needed to hear that.

Like I needed to hear that even the most professional people are gonna mess it up, right? They're gonna say things that don't work for people. And so when I was reading your book, it was almost like that same kind of experience because it was a little bit of a manual for people like me who haven't gone through that experience.

You know, you talk a lot about what people are not saying right, you know, what doesn't work for you. And I think one of those aspects is, is this cathartic? Is this

healing? Right? Because I think we all would love to hear that this, in the end, you're like, I'm the victor, I conquered grief, right? It wasn't like that, though. Why do you think we're so behind? Grief is something that we all are going to struggle with at some point or have, you know, had that in our life, but we still don't have language for it.

Amy Lin

I think the catharsis, I love to hear that someone said on NPR, like, you know, writing isn't cathartic. I get asked that question a lot. And I say something a little bit different. I'm Canadian, so I always say it a little bit more indirectly, but I always tell people, you know, if you're drowning and you grab the life ring, you don't ask that person if they thought that was cathartic. It might be relieving, but it's not cathartic to survive. And I...

I think people feel behind, which I don't believe that we are. I think that we are afraid. I think that there is a kind of fear about grief that a lot of people hold that makes them unsure what to say. And it also makes them scared to enter that space because they don't feel equipped or they don't feel knowledgeable or they don't feel capable of living in that space.

So when you mix up this fear with what is also, I think, a really beautiful human intention to want people not to suffer, that's one of these great things that we have as human beings, especially if someone is right in front of us. We really don't want them to be in pain. And you mix in fear with this really good intention of, I don't want you to suffer. And we end up with this blend of people that try to immediately say something they've probably heard before because that feels safe. So that soothes the fear, okay, I'm doing something safe, I'm not doing something scary. And then they try to make you feel better, which soothes the instinct of I need you

not to be in pain, which is a really kind one. But the issue with both of those blends is that it's really hard for grieverers to hear or hold to those kinds of things because one,

Grieverers know that you're afraid. You know, when I tell people about Kurtis dying, some people will take a physical step back away from me. And the honest people will say, ooh, I just had a moment where I actually got afraid if I was close to you, my husband's gonna die. And those are the honest people. The people that aren't honest will just kind of, their body language just changes. And you know, that's not lost on grieverers.

We know that immediately when we're sharing our story with you, you're counting all of your loved ones and you're grateful that that hasn't come to your shore yet. And you're kind of scared that that might happen to you, but we're living with it. We are also afraid. We are also afraid of the pain that we have been asked to hold. And then on top of that, when people rushed to make grieverers feel better, while that's so human, it's so painful.

Because grieverers are not going to feel better. Grief is not going away. There isn't any way to jazz hands your way into not noticing that your husband is dead. And I always encourage people or urge people, instead of trying to make grieverers feel better, try to make them feel seen. Try to open up a space where they can share with you what grief is like.

Offer them things that allow them to share that with you and then do the beautiful work of witnessing and of holding their experience because it is scary, yes. But the reality is if we are lucky enough to be in relationship with people where we can say

that we love them, then we know on some level that we will grieve them because grief is the final form of love.

It is what love asks of us in the end. We are all going to grieve people that we love. And by holding and hearing and witnessing the people that are doing that work for us, we don't just participate in holding that with them, which is beautiful. Maybe one of the best things we can do for anyone is to bear with them. But we also participate on a small level in the work.

That love will ask of us eventually, even if it hasn't asked that of us now. Eventually we will and we will want, we will need other people to hold it with us.

Amy Allen Clark

I want to talk about Kurtis. You know, one thing that you said in your book is that he loved to be talked about and he also liked to see you talking about him. So I would love for listeners to connect the person to your story too.

Amy Lin

Yeah, Kurtis was a man who loved living so much. It's so impossible to me that he had so little time to do it. He loved stinky wine, which are his words, and very funny reality television shows about dating and also conversely loved films in foreign languages where nothing really happens for three hours. And he loved yogurt drinks, which I found disgusting.

He adored them. Our fridge was overflowing with these tiny bottles of yogurt. And he was also a man who was ultimately deeply, beautifully attuned to the miniature parts of living that really matter. He was the kind of person that would bring home your favorite snack and you wouldn't realize that he knew what it was.

Or he would be out and he would think, oh, I'm going to buy this pair of socks because I noticed that yours had holes in it. Or he would take funny videos of your dog with his new fancy camera and send them to you. Do you know what I mean? These are the small miniature parts of living where people think, oh my gosh, this person is really paying attention to me. And he applied that kind of attention to everybody, which is not, everyone says when someone has died that they love that of course they were this astronaut of a person.

And so I know this sounds like, oh, well, there's no way someone could like this could exist. That's what was so remarkable about Kurtis was he, he really existed like that. And to live in the light of someone who is so graceful and who allows for so much grace. I think that you don't come to the world with that kind of attention. If you aren't totally willing to embrace the world with grace.

Because when you pay attention, you see a lot. You know, Kurtis, it's not that the flaws of living or of people missed Kurtis. He just held all of it. He thought, well, okay, this person is doing this one thing, but also there's this part about them. And to have been the recipient of that kind of grace, to live in a life where somebody will accept you in all states of your being is a really radical, and for me, life-altering experience. And it's something, it's not something that I naturally offered people that Kurtis offered me. It's a kind of grace to live in them. And the tax on paying so much attention is that Kurtis loved for people to pay attention to him. And so to be able to speak about him and share him with people, even in this small way that I've done with the book is a really, it's a really special thing. And I know that he would have really loved it because who doesn't love to be paid attention to, but especially a man that paid such close attention to you.

Amy Allen Clark

He sounds amazing. I'm with you on the yogurt drink thing though, I have to say. I'm not into that.

Amy Lin

I did not abide the texture, it's the smell. And he just, he reveled in it. Like he would peel the foil back, he would lick the foil. I'd be like, I would be gagging over a trash can. Well, I...had to ask you because I know that you said how much he loved to be seen in those kinds of ways. And I know that we all can feel that, like the love for him through that. The memories that you share are both the comical, right? Like the guy's night out kind of version of him, as well as the more intimate moments of your marriage. And what struck me is that the book is so nonlinear, right?

The structure of the book is organized in a way that it blends really nicely together. The way that you frame all of these memories can sometimes emerge in one paragraph or in three sentences, we could experience three different experiences, but they all are intertwined. Why did you want to tell the story of Kurtis in a way that gives us lots of different versions of him almost in one paragraph?

Amy Lin

It was important for me two things. The non -linearity came about largely because in grief, it's always present tense. What is past lives as intensely and as in the real as what is. So when Kurtis died, memories of him, memories of our life, those actually in some ways felt more real to me than facts, which was that Kurtis had died and that my life had changed.

And it was important to me in the book with the non -linearity to honor that part of my grief experience, which was that I constantly see sick between experiences of

Kurtis and experiences of my life. And they all feel real to me. And sometimes I'm living outside. I often feel, and I say this in the book, that I live outside of time because the past and the present all live to me on the same temporal plane. And it was important to honor that.

Not everybody experiences grief in that way, but for me, I really do. I wanted readers, as I do in real life, to turn the page of the book and be wondering if Kurtis would be there, because I really do that in real life. I know that Kurtis is dead. I still walk into rooms and I wonder when he's going to be there, or should I save him a seat? And by making the book non-linear, I wove that process in because you knew on any page, in any line, Kurtis could be there and it would be as if he really was. And that is my experience of grief. And because of that, it allowed me to pull from all of these moments of time, because time became this flat circle in the book. And so I could bring all of these different versions of who he was, who I knew him to be, to the page. And I got to show readers the different facets of a man that I knew really well and deeply loved. And the book...doesn't even represent his entire universe. There are so many other versions of him and people that he was and is to other people that love him who hold their own stories of him. It's just the reflection of the parts of him that I held and that I saw. And I wanted to honor, I wanted to honor the fullness of who I knew him to be.

Amy Allen Clark

It was beautifully done. It was a unique structure as well in the fact that there's so much white space sometimes on the page. Intentional for the reader?

Amy Lin

Very.

Very intentional. I was lucky with my press that they, they really allowed me to be deeply involved in the design process. And I really was. I had my publisher and I were speaking and she said, you know, I'm so glad that I know how involved you were in the design process. Because she said outside of it, people wouldn't know that your fingerprints are all over this. And I came into a design meeting, which they graciously allowed me to be a part of with margin measurements. Like I would like them to be, yeah, I really.

I knew, I felt in my body when I was writing that the book needed to be woven together from a craft perspective in a specific way, but that it also had to be physically made in a specific way. And one of those things was that the text needed to float in white space, not just because in grief you feel completely disconnected from any kind of ground. I was so untethered, I would use that word for many years, that I never, I felt like I was floating all the time. And I wanted the text to live in that way, but I also said, readers will need to take a breath. That's just the reality. I have not afforded by the nature of my life, the ability to take a breath. I have to live in the text all the time. But I said, readers, other people, they will need a break because it's really heavy.

And it's really hard and I know that because I'm living it. And I said, the white space will give that to them. It gives them a little moment to just take a breath. And I was so lucky that they really heard me because it's an unusual way of type setting. And I also asked, I had come to the meeting with trim measurements for how big I wanted the book to be. Because I wanted people to be able to carry the book in their everyday bags.

I have some hardcovers that I love, but they are so big they were basically delivered on a flatbed truck. And I can't fit them into any bag I own. Not a real one, not like a

bag I take on the train. And I say, grieving people or people who are supporting grievors, their grievors can't pay attention. And people who are supporting grievors are busy because that's a big task. I said, nobody will be able to read this book in one go. They're gonna carry it with them. And it needs to be a size that they can actually hold that they can actually carry with them. And my press on both the very unusual margin setting and trim size were like, we hear you. And they did it, which is incredible. What a testament to their willingness to hear me.

Amy Allen Clark

Yeah, that is incredibly unusual. I have only had a couple of authors that have even really had a lot of input, I would say, on their cover, because so much of that is designed by a team. And...what you're saying, like being involved from that process is really distinct for anyone who's been on the show or listened to the show for any length of time. That doesn't happen very often. So it really is a testament to the fact that they both believed in the project and believed that what you were doing with like the white space was necessary.

I took this book on a vacation and I also am very, I like my books to be X amount of size and holdable and be able to take space between especially heavy books like this. And I thought it was such a thoughtful way to tell the story, to be able to, you know, read a couple of pages and then put it down and then be able to come right back into the story. And it just was so distinct. The fact that you were so involved in that process is a wonderful thing to get to hear about.

Amy Lin

Yeah, it's really a testament to Zibby Books. They allowed me to be a part of that process. It's not, as you say, standard. And they really invited me to the table of the design. And I was so grateful because I had so many ideas, but I also knew that it

was possible they would come back and say, respectfully, your role has closed and we've got it from here. And I was so grateful that they said, come in, sit at the table. We're going to do what we can to meet you with what you have.

I think that's really the spirit that Zibby Books tries to lead with, which is of, come on in, let's hear you. That's the right place for a book that's really trying to invite people in and say, come on in, let's hear about your pain. I was grateful for that.

Amy Allen Clark

Well, good. I think you are my first Zibby Books author, so I'm glad to hear that experience because it's a wonderful thing to hear that authors get to be included in the entire process.

Well, you touched on grief brain and the reason why you set your story up in that way. And I think there were a lot of, you know, things that I learned about grief through your process of grieving. And some of that, to me, that stood out, I first want to talk about what resources were available to you in Canada, because as a US reader, we have different kinds of resources. Even the process of the funeral and all of that looked different to me as a US reader. So I would love to hear about what resources you were able to tap into, or maybe some surprising discoveries that you had available to you that you didn't know you had.

Amy Lin

Well, that's interesting. I have not heard from anyone that the formal process of administrating death in the States is different from Canada. I'd be very interested to hear how.

Amy Allen Clark

Well, I guess one of the things that stood out to me is that you had to pick a casket when you went through the cremation. And I don't know if that is actually a process that...we do or maybe we do and I don't know it. But then you also talked about having this availability to grief counseling, but there was only one resource. Am I correct in that?

Amy Lin

Yes. So what's really unusual about Calgary, which is where I live, is that it is home to the Bob Glasgow Grief Center and it is the only provincially funded grief support center in North America. So you can only access it if you live where I live. I'm lucky to live here in this sense, because what it does, the whole program provides Grievors who have lost immediate family members with individualized grief counseling that's paid for by our healthcare. So it's completely free for people to access provided they have Alberta healthcare. And then they have access to a grief group for three months where they speak with others in grief. And in these sessions, the group and the individual sessions, you're taught about what's happening to you physically, the physiology of grief.

You're also taught about the emotional trauma of grief and the work that you are trying to process. And you have space and resources with therapists to do that emotional work. And it requires the view, simply a phone call and knowledge. Lots of people live here that don't know about it, but I was grateful enough that my therapist knew about the program and said, you just call the number and they call you back and they say, tell us a little about your story. And you tell them and they admit you and.

I was so thankful for that because I learned so early in my process about things that I would never have known. Things like the fact that in grief, blood is actually taken

from the front of the brain and drawn to the back of the brain, which deals with survival, which means at the front of the brain, which deals with things like communication, timeliness, risk management, emotional management, that part of the brain actually kind of goes a little bit dark because the back of the brain, the am I surviving? Am I going to stay alive? Is really, really online. And so when you need to make a decision or communicate something or gauge, can I cross this road before this car goes by? Or remember the time that you said you would call somebody, you actually have less physical resources to do that. It's actually physically harder to do those things in grief. And lots of people who are grieving who don't know this feel like they're going insane because they can't remember things they used to. Or they take risks that they would never have done before. And so they end up in car crashes or crossing the street and narrowly missing getting struck by a vehicle. And they think, why did I do that? How did I misjudge that? And you feel like you're losing your grip and you're also grieving. But it was very centering for me to realize, oh, it's actually harder for me to gauge these things. And I actually need help remembering things. because I actually don't have the ability really to do that right now. And to be able to access that kind of resource, I think it's invaluable. And I think it's so disastrous in a lot of ways that there aren't these available programs elsewhere. And I'm really grateful whenever I encounter programs, I was just doing an event with Our House, which is out of LA the other day, which provides grief support for people who are grieving in Los Angeles. And I said, I'm sure this is one of the only places people have to actually learn about grief in LA that's accessible to them. And so learning about the realities of grief at the Bob Glasgow Center in some ways was really hard because they're really honest with you. And they say, grief is a five, 10 year burden of processing. And I would sit there and think, 10 years? How can you say that to me? I'm not even gonna make it past seven months.

But the reality of course is that they're right. And actually grief is lifelong, they just don't wanna say that to you. They wanna give you 10 years, cause it feels like a long time, but it still feels like a limit. And I try as much as I can now when I speak about grief to add in some of these realities, some of these facts about grief. You know, like the fact that you can't remember anything years after, the fact that you can't read even years after all of that. It doesn't have to have a physical cause. It could just be emotional, but it actually does have a physical cause.

Amy Allen Clark

One of your statements that you had made that I think just hit me in the heart was that grief is chronic pain. I have chronic pain, and so I can relate only to the unrelenting feeling of it all. I can relate to people wanting you to cheer up, get over it, be there for you for a short amount of time, but also like, okay, like, we get it, you have this, you know, and it's like, but it's not going to stop. And I wish that it would. I think false, like positivity to me or like toxic positivity is not something that I personally subscribe to. And I don't want to be surrounded by people who are like, Oh, just cheer up, like get over it. And so when you just can't stand it, it makes me crazy. It makes me feel crazy.

And so when you said grief is chronic pain, it's like that I get, I get that so much because it isn't something that goes away. But I think that, you know, our idea around grief, even saying 10 years, like as a time limit, that there is a time limit to grief. Yeah, we are there for you. We're here with casseroles. We're here to show up on your doorstep that first couple of months. But then when it goes on for years and years, I mean, that's what you are kind of laying testament to in some of the people that fell away from your story. That, you know, after a couple of years, it's like, okay, well, I'm done with this, right? I guess what do you wish people would understand about that process? I know, like, you have talked a little bit about

bootstraps mentality and like how we have that kind of ingrained, like we need to like, you know, get it together after a certain point. Why can't we get it together? Like, why, why, you know, why do people expect us to, right?

Amy Lin

Totally. I mean, I'm so sorry to hear that you live with chronic pain as well. I think that something that people don't understand about living with physical chronic pain is that it's some kind of grief. It's a grief rooted in your body and the ways in which your body asks you every day to carry something that you really don't want to carry. And there's a grief in that. And I speak to a lot of people who share with me about physical pain. And they say, people don't realize that I live with grief. I live with pain and I live with grief. And so I'm really sorry to hear you hold that because it's really heavy. And it's often very invisible because people don't want to talk to you about it. So I just want to say, I see that. I hear it. I can hear it in your voice. So people want us to feel better. And that's so nice. It's so hard to look at somebody and be like, how dare you want me to feel better? You know what I mean? You feel like you're, you can't really, in some ways you feel really like you can't make this a criticism of somebody, that they don't want you to suffer longer. But the reality is that it is a really good human instinct. We should all try to hold each other. And if we can help somebody feel better, if we can sign their past and tell them that we hope their bone heals faster, then we should.

But the reality is with things like chronic pain, be it physical or emotional or grief, is that it isn't going away, it's chronic. So then our conversation, it has to change and it has to become, how can I witness you? How can I bear with you? And that's where people struggle. And that's totally fine. We all have a lot of intensities in our own lives which all loom very large for us. And it can be really hard to continue to enter that space with people. And I have, and it's in the book too, I have friends that

have surprised me at different points in my journey with grief, that have said with different, with varying degrees of directness, I just can't do this anymore. It's just, your life is too much for me. And...

Some people don't say it that directly, and some people do say it that directly. Either way, they reach a limit. And I think when people rush for what I consider sort of blind positivity, a deliberate blindness to the realities of some people's lives, they're not so much living in that genuine desire for you to be out of pain. They're living more in, well, I've come up against a limit.

I've reached a place where I need you to be this way because I can't do it anymore. And that's a shift that people don't clock. They don't quite realize when they leave, I don't want you to suffer and enter, I can't do this. And I think both things are true. Some people do reach a limit. And we know that in Greek therapy, they tell you, you will lose friends. They're gonna walk away. And...

I don't hold any judgment over that. I find it painful. Don't mistake me there. I find it deeply painful, but I don't hold judgment because it is also really human to have a limit. I have a limit for grief. It's in the book. You know, I have said before how much pain we're asked to hold. I just couldn't do it by myself. And I have people in my life who have walked with me.

And I think we have a sensation too, particularly people who reach a limit. I think they think they have to be load-bearing all the time. They have this all or nothing view of how they need to support you. But that's really not the case. I have some friends of mine, one friend in particular that I'm thinking of, she has texted me on the 15th of every month, Kurtis died on August 15th.

And she texts me on the 15th of every month. Still, it's been over three and a half years. She never, I think she missed one 15th because she was on an airplane. And it's just a simple text message. I'm sure it's a reminder in her phone. And she comes in and she says, I'm thinking about you. I'm thinking about Kurtis and it's so steady and it's so small and it looms so large for me. She's the only person in my life that remembers that date. And I would expect nobody to remember that honestly. It's.

It's just a day for so many people and it's, there's so many of them. There's so many 15s. And she, I think I'm somewhere, somewhere along the way she committed to one small thing and that's what she could do. And it's amazing. And so people that leave or people that hit you with a, you must feel better by now, right? You drank a ginger shot and it's gone. All the pain is gone.

They're all or nothing it. They think that they have to constantly do the casserole and they really don't. You know? And that's the kind of thinking, bringing more nuance and also realizing that you can go smaller. And that's okay, but let's not go over the top on the positivity. Let's go small. Let's do a small thing. If you need it, you could say, has something felt tender to you today?

And if someone says no, okay, retire the question and maybe they say yes, but let's not say downward dog your way out of sadness. That's all you need. It's actually your weak pelvic floor. That's the reason that you're still in pain. Let's avoid these sweeping ideas of what we can or cannot offer people. I love that.

Amy Allen Clark

You know, I will have to see if I can find it, but I did watch this really great TikTok about friendship and thinking about it more as like a subscription plan. So I'm thinking about your friends that on the 15th checks in on you and that we have

different levels of subscription plans with our friends. And we have friends that maybe we only talk to every six months. Maybe we only see them annually, but that's the plan that they are on. And instead of anticipating like, why haven't they checked in? You know, I do think sometimes when you're going through hard things, you do feel alone, but just that mindset shift of saying, okay, that's a person that is only here for me maybe once a month, but it means something to me and those transactions or those experiences with them, I should say, are meaningful, then thinking about it, like that I expect them to show up every week because it is tiring to be around someone that, you know, maybe isn't getting better or you're kind of stationary at different points in your journeys.

And you need those kinds of friends who are like, hey, you know, let's just go to the movies. I know it's not a good day. Like we don't even have to talk versus like the one who's showing up at the casserole. All of these people are important in different ways, but I do think people get burnt out because they do think I need to be here every week. Like I'm just exhausted because I'm taking care of this person. But it's like really, if you just sent me a text and said, Hey, I hope today is a good day. Like that's it.

Like that's all I need is to know that you're still here. I think people get overwhelmed with the idea or the mentality that they think that they have to do more for you.

Amy Lin

They do. And that's, you know, that's in so many ways, its own conversation of how much we expect people, particularly women who are very socialized to carry these kinds of emotional burdens for people. There is this kind of idea that women are

going to do all of it. And I think we saw this in the pandemic you know, this crisis of what women can do, where suddenly everyone was at home and women are like, listen, I actually can't, I cannot actually do all of this now. We've reached a goal, you know, we reached kind of a global conversation about how much women were doing that was unseen, that became very visible during the pandemic when everybody was home. And suddenly all of that labor fell largely to women. And women were like, well, I can't also manage the global grief of a pandemic on top of this. And.

Yeah, it's just, I think in friendships, it's so interesting. I think a lot about friendships, but I think we have to do what we can. And if that's a text message, great. And then as a griever, I also will encourage people to say, if you need something, if you need help from a friend, ask some. Because I had some friends who said to me after Kurtis died, I think we're closer now. And I said, what are you talking about? Like we've always been close. I have asked you for help because we're close.

And they said, no, you've never asked me for help before. And for them, being able to show up for me was a way for them to be close to me in a way that they hadn't been before. And they craved the desire, the opportunity to help me in ways that other people didn't. And that was also a surprise for them. Wow, they want to be here every week with a guest role. And some people do, and some people don't. And by asking and by living in conversation with your friends, we can all...

support each other a little bit better when we talk about it and we don't assume, oh, I have to do this. Oh, I need to provide this grief and friendship both thrive, I believe with grace for the other person and with honesty for what we need. When it comes

to young widowhood, like, you know, we're typically used to people being leader in stages of life when they're navigating that.

Amy Allen Clark

Has there been anything that's surprised you about all of this? Like being a young widow, have you felt removed from certain conversations or aspects of this journey because it's different than someone who has, you know, experienced this later in their life?

Amy Lin

Yes, that's a beautiful question. Thank you for asking that. Being a very young widow is very alienating because you have in so many ways gone ahead, not only of your age group peers, but often ahead of people who are your parents age. And your life experiences have aged you, often changed you, often caused you to think and speak in ways that very few people around you actually do. And it's a funny...place to live and I don't mean funny haha, I mean strange. It's a strange place to navigate because you are constantly being told indirectly and directly how much of your life you have left. And so some people will often tell me, well, you can get married again. And I know that it is offered as a kind of assurance, but it's really painful to hear that a lot, and I do hear that a lot because I am so young. That buried in this idea is that marriage will solve all my grief problems. I'm just gonna replace Kurtis with a new partner and you'll feel better. But of course we know that isn't true. One, we know that we actually can't guarantee marriage at all. That's an impossibility to guarantee. And then we also know that even if a new relationship is found, if new love finds its way, that will just live alongside the grief. It won't replace it or serve as a cure for it. And I think young widows in particular really, I think they really have to carry that thought that people have, which is that, oh, well, at least

you're young. And then on top of that, they're also living in a world where everybody around them is getting mortgages or trying to have a baby or...going to the gym with their partners or going on vacations with their families. And they live these lives that feel from the outside, never from the inside when you really speak about it. But from the outside, they feel like they're just working out. And you think, how is it so easy for everybody else? Of course, when you speak to those people, someone's mother has early onset dementia or someone's brother has mental illness and you realize, oh, we're all in.

We're just in different pain. But when you're grieving the loss of a partner, you are inside a reality that is very difficult for people your age to comprehend, and they're really scared too. So I have found it to be isolating in some ways. And not because I'm not supported by people, I really am. I've just realized, oh,

It will be decades before most of my friends can say, oh, this is what grief feels like. And they'll hold it differently, likely, because they'll be at a different life stage. And that makes me especially grateful for the few friends that I have that have also gone through young widowhood, which is awful. I hate that we have that in common, but I have a couple of them and they have been real supports for me because I will sometimes meet up with them and nothing needs to be explained. You just get right into it of, do you feel insane? And they'll say, yeah, I feel insane. And you'll say, do you still have the ashes in the house? And they'll say, yeah, I do. And these aren't things that my other friends are talking about. And I'm grateful to have a space with someone my age to say, I know it's so crazy that...we're talking about whether we got our partner's life insurance, you know, Kurtis and I didn't have life insurance, but if we had, we think about things like that and other people don't. And so I think it's really important for anyone in grief, but particularly if you are very young in it, to seek out other young widows. It's been really important for me.

Amy Allen Clark

Well, my sister, she works in oncology and I had like sent her a message last night, just like, hey, do you have any suggestions of a question to ask for Amy?

And one thing she said was, ask her how she honors her husband's memory. Like, does she have any special ways that you celebrate Kurtis or anything? And maybe just how you're moving forward while still kind of holding space for these days. Like you say the 15th, your friend sends you this message. Are there any special routines that you do that bring you some kind of comfort or peace as you're going through this?

Amy Lin

Yeah, I think it's such a great question. So something that I learned from my friend Rebecca, who is also in the book and who is the one who I chased down through different contexts to become friends with. Rebecca is a really, she's a really symbolic griever. So she participates in all of these beautiful rituals that honor and memorialize her husband and they're stunning. They're really beautiful and she holds his favorite clothes, or she plays his guitar, or she participates in activities or buys food that he loves at regular and very sacred intervals. And I don't do any of those things. I find Kurtis's possessions, the things that were his and ours, to be very painful. I have them all in storage and I don't go there because I find it really...brutal that somebody's things could live longer than them. It's wild to me that his t-shirts could have a longer life than he did. It doesn't seem like it should be that way. And so I really can't bear the stuff. That Rebecca can pull out his clothes or his guitar. I sit there and I say, wow, how can you hold it? And for her, it's a really important ritual, but I can't go there.

And it's been so wonderful to have Rebecca because she grieves very differently from me. I never light candles and I don't go near the stuff, which she will say to me, but you wrote a book. She's like, I think I'm doing it wrong. I lit a candle last night. Okay, great. She's like, you wrote an entire book. You put the name of Kurtis in other people's hands. She's like, what? She's like, I feel like I'm doing it wrong. I think I should be writing a book. And together we've kind of realized we've been able to hold for each other that you grieve just with what you have. Rebecca's a really symbolic person. And I am a sentimental person, but for whatever reason, I find this stuff really painful on my grief journey and what I have is writing. And so my ritual, truthfully, it's writing about Kurtis. It's speaking about him in activities like this beautiful podcast. And those are the ways that I carry him with me. And I still haven't lit, I haven't lit a single candle in three years. And I want to, I really want to be that person. I'm just not. But I have really spoken a lot about Kurtis and I have written a lot about Kurtis. And in those ways, I honor and carry him. And I also, I'm a really private person, truthfully. And so it is really strange to live in the world as someone who's very private, but who has a really public pain.

It's a really strange dissonance to be in and I am only able to be in it because I carry Kurtis with me because he had a comfort and a willingness to sit in vulnerability and to open the doors of who he was to people that is totally unlike me. And I'm able to sit in my own vulnerability and my own pain very publicly because of Kurtis. I access in some ways a kind of his courage by knowing him and holding who he is with me. And it's the only way I'm able to do this kind of work. Left to my own devices, I would never do this kind of work. This is Kurtis and his courage and how much of him I carry with me working in the world. And those are the ways that I show up for him and honor him.

Amy Allen Clark

Amy, your book, it's, it's beautiful. And hearing more about your story, I'm grateful that I got to witness a part of this journey. You honored him through all of these beautiful memories, but also that you are giving people like me a handbook on how to do and show up a little bit better for the people that are grieving in our life. I'm grateful for the work that you're doing. As we are closing out, we typically ask our guests what they are feeling most proud of. And it can be this project or just in general where you're at right now.

Amy Lin

What am I most proud of? Truthfully, I'm right now most proud of my Great Dane who recently got diagnosed with cancer, which is difficult. She's very, she is very old and it's very standard in Danes. But the physician told us that her life would be actually greatly extended if we amputated her front leg, because that's primarily where the cancer was. And so I, we chose to do that. And she has just totally adapted to this life as a they call them try pods, like pause. She's totally adapted to tripod life with her exact same gentleness and tenderness and excitement for being alive in the world. And I just watch her hop along now as we go on walks. And I think I tell her 95 times a day, I am so proud of you. This is such a heart thing. And you are just absolutely doing so great. And I'm truly really, that's the thing I'm most proud of right now is I'm the most proud of my dog because she has really enthusiastically taken on this life as a three legged dog. And it's amazing. You know, we're always so proud of the people and things we love when they take on something that's really hard with Grace. So my dog, one of my dogs, I have two obviously.

I love that. Well, friends **Here After** is available on store shelves now. I hope that you will pick this up, especially after hearing more of Amy Lin's story. Thank you, Amy.

Amy Lin

Thank you so much.

This transcript is provided for informational purposes only. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the transcription, errors and omissions may occur. The content of this transcript may not be comprehensive and should not be relied upon as a substitute for professional advice or judgment. The views and opinions expressed by individuals in this transcript are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the transcriber or any associated entities. Furthermore, this transcript may be subject to copyright protection. Any reproduction, distribution, or other use of this transcript without the express permission of the copyright owner is strictly prohibited.