

### The Obliterated Place

#### LETTER WRITER #1. Dear Sugar,

One.

It's taken me many weeks to compose this letter and even still, I can't do it right. The only way I can get it out is to make a list instead of write a letter.

Two.

I don't have a definite question for you. I'm a sad, angry man whose son died. I want him back. That's all I ask for and it's not a question.

Three.

Nearly four years ago, a drunk driver drove through a red light and hit my son at full speed. The dear boy I loved more than life itself was dead before the paramedics even got to him. He was twenty-two, my only child.

Four.

I'm a father while not being a father. Most days it feels like my grief is going to kill me, or maybe it already has. I'm a living dead dad.

Five.

Your column has helped me go on. I have faith in my version of God and I pray every day and the way I feel when I'm in my deepest prayer is the way I feel when I read your words.

Six.

I see a psychologist regularly and I'm not clinically depressed or on medication.

Seven.

Suicide has occurred to me but I can't do it because it would be a betrayal of my values and also of the values I instilled in my son.

Eight.

I have good friends and family who are supportive and even my ex-wife and I have become close friends again since our son's death.

Nine.

I have a good job and my health.

Ten.

I'm going on with things in a way that makes it appear like I'm adjusting to life without my son, but the fact is I'm living a private hell.

Eleven.

Sometimes the pain is so great I simply lie in my bed and wail.

Twelve.

I can't stop thinking about my son.

Thirteen.

I can't stop thinking about the things my son would be doing now if he were alive and also the things I did with him when he was young.

Fourteen.

I hate the man who killed my son. For his crime, he was incarcerated eighteen months, then released. He wrote me a letter of apology, but I barely scanned it, I ripped it into pieces and threw it in the garbage.

Fifteen.

I fear you will choose not to answer my letter because you haven't lost a child.

Sixteen.

I fear if you choose to answer my letter people will make critical comments about you, saying you don't have the right to speak to this matter because you have not lost a child.

Seventeen.

I pray you will never lose a child.

Eighteen.

I will understand if you choose not to answer my letter. Most people, kind as they are, don't know what to say to me so why should you?

Nineteen.

Extra-1

I'm writing to you because the way you've written about your grief over your mother dying so young has been meaningful to me.

Twenty.

What can you say to me?

Twenty-one.

How do I go on?

Twenty-two.

How do I become human again?

Signed,

Living Dead Dad

~~SORRY Dear Living Dead Dad,~~

~~One.~~

~~I don't know how you go on without your son. I only know that you do and you have and you will.~~

~~Two.~~

~~Your shattering letter is proof of that.~~

~~Three.~~

~~You don't need me to tell you how to be human again. You are there, in all of your humanity, shining unmistakably before every person reading those words right now.~~

~~Four.~~

~~I am so sorry for your loss. I am so sorry for your loss.~~

~~I am sorry for you, too.~~

~~Five.~~

~~You could stitch together a quilt with all the times that that has been and will be said to you. You could make a river of consolation words. But they won't bring your son back. They won't keep that man from getting into his car and careening through that red light at the precise moment your son was in his path.~~

~~Six.~~

~~You'll never keep that man from getting into that car.~~

~~Seven.~~

~~When you peel back the rage and you peel back the thoughts of suicide and you peel back the man who got into the car, at the center of that there is your pure father love that is stronger than anything.~~

~~Eight.~~

~~No one can touch that love or alter it or take it away from you. Your love for your son belongs only to you.~~

~~Nine.~~

~~Small things have saved me: how much I love my mother ever after all these years. How powerfully I carry her within me. My grief is tremendous but my love is bigger. So is yours. You are not grieving your son's death because his death was ugly and unfair. You're grieving it because you loved him truly. The beauty in that is greater than the bitterness of his death.~~

~~Ten.~~

~~I keep imagining you lying on your bed and waiting. I keep thinking that hard as it is to do it's time for you to go silent and lift your head from the bed and listen to what's there in the wake of your wail.~~

~~Eleven.~~

~~In your life, the one you must make in the obliterated place that is now your world, where everything you used to be is simultaneously erased and omnipresently where you are forevermore a living dead dad.~~

~~Twelve.~~

~~A literal translation of the word "obliterate" is being against the letters. It was impossible for you to write me a letter, so you made me a list instead.~~

~~Thirteen.~~

~~The obliterated place is equal parts destruction and creation. The obliterated place is pitch black and it is bright light. It is water and it is parched earth. It is mud and it is manna. The work of deep grief is making a home there.~~