



Mairead Ajisola

THE PEOPLE'S PEDAGOGUE

©maireadajisola.com

Grief

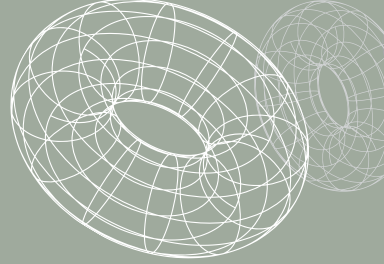
A meditation on the absence of things

The Even Ibis Productions | Spring 2025

MaireadAjisola.com

The People's Pedagogy

SELF-LIBERATION IN PRACTICE



Grief

A meditation on the absence of things

©maireadajisola.com

For those witnessing the loss of things: An intentional meditation to guide yourself toward liberating emotions around loss. This offering begins to consider how we honor what we once held and encourage finding ways to remember what is lost. You are invited to meditate on the following offerings in a healing space or discuss with others the connections you hold to these words.

©maireadajisola.com

©maireadajisola.com

"The main thing to be against is Death!
Everything else is a Chump!"

-Amiri Baraka

(writer, poet, activist)

©maireadajisola.com

©maireadajisola.com

Many years ago, during a writing class, my professor wandered into a tangential conversation and shared his personal thoughts on death and how dying changes everything. I recall many things he said in that conversation. Yet, one statement stayed in my mind leaving an indelible impression ... his disdain for cemeteries and the futility of a place that's "only purpose is to remark on **the absence of a thing.**"

"Instead of wishing to go back to a time of collective ignorance or personal naïveté, ask for the courage and community to see/hold reality. Only then can you fully start the grieving process and begin to understand that everything has changed and nothing is going back to the way it once was. You have more power than you believe."

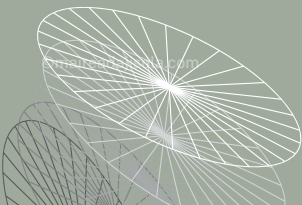
©maireadajisola.com

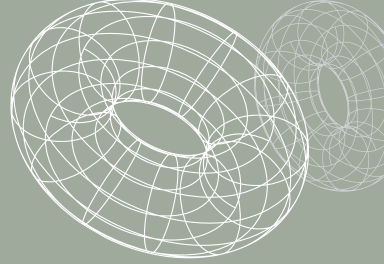
- Adriana Michelle

(Transition and Rebirth Doula, Storyteller)

Share your thoughts with MaireadAjisola@gmail.com

The Even Ibis Productions | Spring 2025





Grief

A meditation on the absence of things

©maireadajisola.com

Trigger Warning: The subject matter of the following story may be emotionally challenging for some readers. The content of this story includes discussion of suicide, death and dying which may be emotionally triggering, traumatic or inappropriate for some of the community. To prevent further distress in those who may be potentially disturbed by this material, please be aware and refrain from continuing to read the following story. Take care of yourselves because you deserve it.

maireadajisola.com

©maireadajisola.com

©maireadajisola.com

“Grief must be
witnessed to be healed.”

-Elizabeth Kubler-Ross

©maireadajisola.com

An old-timer, about 80 years old wearing a cowboy hat, approached me today in the parking lot of the local grocery store. While we exchanged polite chat, he handed me a small pewter trinket of an angel with the inscription on the back “LOVE” in cursive writing. I appreciated the gesture, so I gave him an ear while he told his “story.”

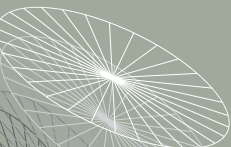
©maireadajisola.com

He began his story by saying, “I’ve only had two bad days in my life. He rattled off the exact date in 1979 when his first bad day occurred. He noted how many miles it was from where we were currently standing. Then, he detailed the size of a large diesel engine truck and how fast it was going when it “blew a red light” killing his two children. The girl child was 4 years old and the boy child was 22 months.

maireadajisola.com

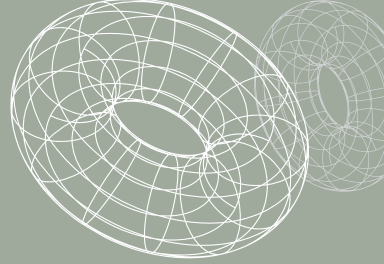
Share your thoughts with MaireadAjisola@gmail.com

The Even Ibis Productions | Spring 2025



The People's Pedagogy

SELF-LIBERATION IN PRACTICE



Grief

A meditation on the absence of things (continued)

©maireadajisola.com

His face stayed as placid and friendly as it was when he smiled while making a quip about how the prairie lands around us were “god’s country, because no one else would have it.”

I blurted out something to the effect of “my goodness that’s devastating, how terrible, I’m so sorry for your loss.” These statements were not meaningless to me, they were genuinely felt. This vulnerability from a stranger appeared so suddenly.

He brushed off my responses saying, “let me finish telling my story.”

MaireadAjisola.com

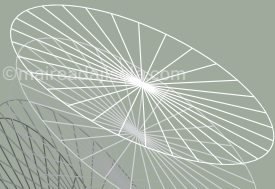
He continued.

MaireadAjisola.com

The “second bad day” in his life began as he recounted a date in the same year and motioned to the cemetery over the hill behind us. Did I know it? Yes, I nodded in recognition and he recounted the moment he stood watching one child “in a 4 foot and the other in a 5 foot.”

As simply as he said it, he passed the image to me, bringing into my mind’s eye ... baby bodies in coffins, being put into the ground, not far from where we now stood. Without thinking as it fell from my mouth, I said, “No parent should have to bury their children.”

I don’t think I was even aware I was talking until he shushed me again. This time with his hand he shooed away what I said with a curt retort, “I need to finish my story, where was I? I’ve told this story so many times before, let me just get through it,” and he continued.

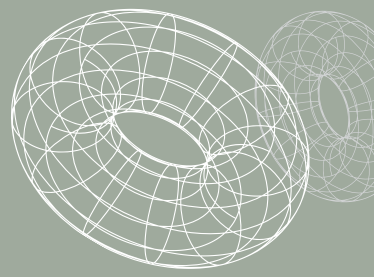


Share your thoughts with MaireadAjisola@gmail.com

The Even Ibis Productions | Spring 2025

The People's Pedagogue

SELF-LIBERATION IN PRACTICE



Grief

A meditation on the absence of things (continued)

©maireadajisola.com

Silence from me.

MaireadAjisola.com

He then blasted the story forward from six months after his “second bad day” to the break up of his marriage and moving his wife into an apartment of her own in the city three hours away.

Great effort was made to explain how supportive he was in the moving process, the suitability of the apartment for her and the dissolution of the marriage after “the two worst days” of his life. Then, a hairpin turn to 2011 when he learned his estranged wife committed suicide.

MaireadAjisola.com

MaireadAjisola.com

Now, shocked and silent, my face held the subtitles.

He drew my attention back to the angel he’d given me at the start of the conversation moments earlier and asked what the cursive inscription read, “LOVE”, I said. Now, he was smiling again. And laughing to himself he said, “Love? What is that right? Who knows these days?”

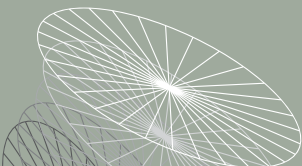
©maireadajisola.com

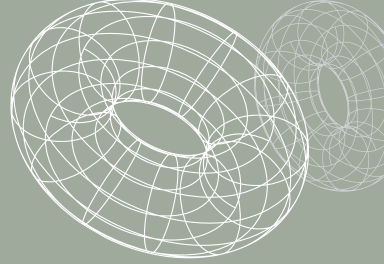
These moments of loss were shared like any well-worn and rehearsed story. As a person might retell a snapshot of a distinct memory or a pithy parable when you don’t want to misplace the moral. Any interruption, an inconvenience.

As he engaged me in this testimony, it was clear, and he said as much, the story was told many times before. He shared that he tells this story, passes out angel trinkets and recites the worst days of his life habitually.

Share your thoughts with MaireadAjisola@gmail.com

The Even Ibis Productions | Spring 2025





Grief

A meditation on the absence of things (continued)

©maireadajisola.com

In the course of no more than a 7 minute interaction, I'd become emotionally drained by taking in the devastation this man experienced. And equally drained in the inability to say something comforting to him or myself in the course of the telling.

©maireadajisola.com

In a short time I'd gone from pleasantly curious to horrified and compassionate, yet my concern was dismissed. Being asked to witness and say nothing held me hostage in this man's grief.

I felt a whole saga of responses rise up within me and linger, aimless. And these deeply personal incidents within the life of a man who recited them with detachment disquieted the usual connection that is born of sharing such vulnerability.

©maireadajisola.com

Emotionally I began to disengage as he continued to talk about his life as a long haul trucker seeing the country from the cab. Whatever nerve tendons and anxieties this man's sorrow pulled up from me, were not met in kind. I knew I needed to retract and gather back into myself.

He did not want pity, compassion or even an active listener. He simply needed to speak. I understood his stoicism might also be his defense mechanism in recalling these personal experiences but if that were the case, who was forcing him to share? Not me. I had walked into the conversation innocently, patiently. His call to make testimony was his own.

His only request was that I hear him. His request was that I remain an audience and allow him to render his private pain in public, a silent witness for whom these worn memories are new and the grief he carries with him *seen*.

Share your thoughts with MaireadAjisola@gmail.com

The Even Ibis Productions | Spring 2025





The People's Pedagogue

Self-Liberation in Practice

“Grief must
be witnessed
to be healed.”

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross