



LOVE & STUFF

DELVE DEEPER READING LIST



This list of fiction and nonfiction books, compiled by Rachael Harkness, of Portland Public Library, provides a range of perspectives on the issues raised by the POV documentary *Love & Stuff*.

“How do you live without your mother?” Filmmaker Judith Helfand asks this unbearable question twice: once as a daughter caring for her terminally ill mother, and again as an “old new mom” single-parenting her much-longed-for adopted baby girl. With footage from 25 years of first-person filmmaking, shiva babka, and 63 boxes of dead parents’ “stuff,” the film asks: What do we really need to leave our children?

Love & Stuff is a nonlinear documentary that follows Helfand as she cares for her dying mother and sorts through the emotional and literal “stuff” left behind. The film invites thoughtful examination of parenting and caregiving, end-of-life care, grief and loss, the difficulty of letting go, and the deep and abiding love that goes on beyond death.

Contributors

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ADULT NON-FICTION

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Notes on Grief*. New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 2021.

Notes on Grief is an exquisite work of meditation, remembrance, and hope, written in the wake of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's beloved father's death in the summer of 2020. As the COVID-19 pandemic raged around the world, and kept Adichie and her family members separated from one another, her father succumbed unexpectedly to complications of kidney failure. Expanding on her original New Yorker piece, Adichie shares how this loss shook her to her core. She writes about being one of the millions of people grieving this year; about the familial and cultural dimensions of grief and also about the loneliness and anger that are unavoidable in it.

Devine, Megan. *It's ok that you're not ok : meeting grief and loss in a culture that doesn't understand*. Boulder, CO : Sounds True, 2017.

Having experienced grief from both sides-- as a therapist and as a woman who witnessed the accidental drowning of her beloved partner-- Devine writes with deep insight about the unspoken truths of loss, love, and healing. She debunks the culturally prescribed goal of returning to a normal, 'happy' life, replacing it with a far healthier middle path, one that invites us to build a life alongside grief rather than seeking to overcome it.

Kessler, David. *Finding Meaning : The Sixth Stage of Grief*. New York, NY : Scribner, 2019.

In this groundbreaking new work, David Kessler--an expert on grief and the coauthor with Elisabeth Kübler-Ross of the iconic *On Grief and Grieving*--journeys beyond the classic five stages to discover a sixth stage: meaning.

In 1969, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross identified five stages of dying in her book *On Death and Dying*. Now Kessler introduces a critical sixth stage: finding meaning that can transform grief into a more peaceful and hopeful experience. Though his journey with grief began as a child, his life was upended by the sudden death of his twenty-one-year-old son. Here he shares the insights, collective wisdom, and powerful tools he has learned over the decades.

Nutik Zitter, Jessica. *Extreme measures : finding a better path to the end of life*. New York: Avery, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2017.

Extreme Measures charts Zitter's journey from wanting to be one kind of hero to becoming another—a doctor who prioritizes the patient's values and preferences in an environment where the default choice is the extreme use of technology. In our current medical culture, the old and the ill are put on what she terms the End-of-Life Conveyor belt. They are intubated,

catheterized, and even shelved away in care facilities to suffer their final days alone, confused, and often in pain. In her work Zitter has learned what patients fear more than death itself: the prospect of dying badly. She builds bridges between patients and caregivers, formulates plans to allay patients' pain and anxiety, and enlists the support of loved ones so that life can end well, even beautifully.

O'Malley, Patrick with Tim Madigan. *Getting grief right : finding your story of love in the sorrow of loss*. Boulder, CO : Sounds True, 2017.

Illuminated by O'Malley's own story and those of many clients that he's supported, readers learn how the familiar "stages of grief" too often mislabel our sorrow as a disorder, press us to "get over it," and amplify our suffering with shame and guilt when we do not achieve "closure" in due course.

O'Rourke, Meghan. *The Long Goodbye*. Riverhead Books, 2011.

What does it mean to mourn today, in a culture that has largely set aside rituals that acknowledge grief? After her mother died of cancer at the age of fifty-five, Meghan O'Rourke found that nothing had prepared her for the intensity of her sorrow. In the first anguished days, she began to create a record of her interior life as a mourner, trying to capture the paradox of grief-its monumental agony and microscopic intimacies-an endeavor that ultimately bloomed into a profound look at how caring for her mother during her illness changed and strengthened their bond.

O'Rourke's story is one of a life gone off the rails, of how watching her mother's illness-and separating from her husband-left her fundamentally altered. But it is also one of resilience, as she observes her family persevere even in the face of immeasurable loss.

With lyricism and unswerving candor, *The Long Goodbye* conveys the fleeting moments of joy that make up a life, and the way memory can lead us out of the jagged darkness of loss. Effortlessly blending research and reflection, the personal and the universal, it is not only an exceptional memoir, but a necessary one.

Zauner, Michelle. *Crying in H Mart*. New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 2021.

In this exquisite story of family, food, grief, and endurance, Michelle Zauner proves herself far more than a dazzling singer, songwriter, and guitarist. With humor and heart, she tells of growing up one of the few Asian American kids at her school in Eugene, Oregon; of struggling with her mother's particular, high expectations of her; of a painful adolescence; of treasured months spent in her grandmother's tiny apartment in Seoul, where she and her mother would bond, late at night, over heaping plates of food.

ADULT FICTION

Clemmons, Zinzi. *What We Lose*. Penguin Books, 2018.

This aptly titled book of vignettes skillfully depicts how a mother's dying and death spill into and disrupt every corner of her daughter's life. As the narrator attempts to manage her grief, she discovers how biological, racial, and emotional bonds are inexorable and that, ultimately, we are our mothers' daughters.

Fung, Pik-Shuen. *Ghost Forest: A Novel*. One World Books, 2021.

Ghost Forest is about a woman's attempts to grieve the loss of her father. The protagonist wonders how to grieve in a family that doesn't talk about feelings. To add to this, her father was often absent throughout her childhood, leaving her with more questions than answers. In her attempts to gain some sense of resolution and understanding, she seeks stories from her mother and grandmother. As the stories begin to coalesce into a portrait of her father, the novel also delves into the cultural context of Chinese Canadian "astronaut" families.

Vuong, Ocean. *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*. New York : Penguin Press, 2019.

On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous is a letter from a son to a mother who cannot read. Written when the speaker, Little Dog, is in his late twenties, the letter unearths a family's history that began before he was born -- a history whose epicenter is rooted in Vietnam -- and serves as a doorway into parts of his life his mother has never known, all of it leading to an unforgettable revelation. At once a witness to the fraught yet undeniable love between a single mother and her son, it is also a brutally honest exploration of race, class, and masculinity.

Ward, Jesymn. *Sing, Unburied Sing*. Scribner Book Company, 2018. In the mythical, elegant, and unapologetic tradition of Toni Morrison, Ward conjures the ghost of a wrongfully killed son and brother. Those left behind—River, a sturdy patriarch, whose wife is slowly dying on their bed, and his grandson Jo Jo habitually abandoned by Leonie, his grief-stricken, addicted mother—must carry on.

Woodson, Jacqueline. *Red at the Bone*. Riverhead Books, 2019. Woodson's poetically lush language cradles us as she depicts the triumphs and losses of a multi-generational family. After a teen pregnancy, Iris makes an unlikely, but still natural choice to find herself and pursue her greatest potential. Her absence from her daughter's life reverberates through shifting perspectives as ideals of motherhood are challenged in this honest, unflinching portrait.

YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Becker, Aaron. *A Stone for Sascha*. Somerville, Mass : Candlewick Press. 2018.

The award-winning, big-hearted novel about being seen for who you really are, and a love story you can't help but root for Amanda Hardy is the new girl in school. Like anyone else, all she wants is to make friends and fit in. But Amanda is keeping a secret, and she's determined not to get too close to anyone. But when she meets sweet, easygoing Grant, Amanda can't help but start to let him into her life. As they spend more time together, she realizes just how much she is losing by guarding her heart. She finds herself yearning to share with Grant everything about herself, including her past. But Amanda's terrified that once she tells him the truth, he won't be able to see past it. Because the secret that Amanda's been keeping? It's that at her old school, she used to be Andrew. Will the truth cost Amanda her new life, and her new love?

Alternately warm-hearted and dark-spirited, desperate and mirthful, *Little Fish* explores the winter of discontent in the life of one transgender woman as her past and future become irrevocably entwined.

Benjamin, Ali. *The Thing About Jellyfish*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers : New York, 2017.

After her best friend dies in a drowning accident, Suzy is convinced that the true cause of the tragedy must have been a rare jellyfish sting--things don't just happen for no reason. Retreating into a silent world of imagination, she crafts a plan to prove her theory--even if it means traveling the globe, alone. Suzy's achingly heartfelt journey explores life, death, the astonishing wonder of the universe...and the potential for love and hope right next door.

Benway, Robin. *A Year to the Day*. New York: Harper Teen, 2022.

It's been a year--a year of missing Nina. A year of milestones--holidays, birthdays, everything without her. Leo feels like she should remember what happened that night. But all she knows is that she left the party and got into a car with Nina and Nina's boyfriend, East. East, who once promised Nina he'd watch out for her younger sister. East, who has been trying to keep that promise every day since. But East won't give Leo the one thing she wants--the one thing she needs. He won't tell her anything about the accident. He won't talk about that night at all. As the days tumble one into the next, Leo's story comes together while her world falls apart.

The only constant is the one person who can help her bear the enormous weight of her love for Nina--and East might be carrying too heavy a load of his own.

Fox, Helena. *How it Feels to Float*. New York : Dial Books, 2019.

Sixteen-year-old Biz sees her father every day, though he died when she was seven. When he suddenly disappears, she tumbles into a disaster-land of grief and depression from which she must find her way back.

James, Matt. *The Funeral*. New York: Greenwood : Toronto, ON. 2018.

After sixteen-year-old Fresia learns--and tells her friends--that their perfect life on a luxurious tropical island is not real, she is banished from her virtual world to the "mainland," where people are ugly, school is hard, and families are dysfunctional.

Salerno, Steven. *Tim's Goodbye*. New York : Farrar Straus Giroux, 2018.

A touching picture book about a group of children who must say goodbye to a dear friend. Margot is sad because her beloved pet, Tim, has died. She and her friends band together to give him a proper sendoff. Melinda brings her French horn. Vincent brings balloons. Otto wears his best hat. When all gather together, they celebrate Tim's beautiful, simple life as they send him on a surprising farewell journey to a special place above the mountains and beyond the clouds. And Margot has a feeling that Tim is happy once again. This tender story from Steven Salerno also features his beautiful illustrations, with a simple color palette and classic feel. *Tim's Goodbye* is sure to strike a chord with readers who have experienced a difficult farewell.

YOUNG ADULT NONFICTION

Kilmartin, Laurie. *Dead People Suck*. Rodale : Penn, 2017.

Death is not for the faint of heart, and sometimes the best way to cope is through humor. No one knows this better than comedian Laurie Kilmartin. She made headlines by live-tweeting her father's time in hospice and her grieving process after he passed, and channeled her experience into a comedy special, *45 Jokes About My Dead Dad*. *Dead People Suck* is her hilarious guide to surviving (sometimes) death, dying, and grief without losing your mind.

Dungo, AJ. *In Waves*. Nobrow : UK, 2019.

In this visually arresting graphic novel, surfer and illustrator AJ Dungo remembers his late partner, her battle with cancer, and their shared love of surfing that brought them strength throughout their time together. With his passion for surfing uniting many narratives, he intertwines his own story with those of some of the great heroes of surf in a rare work of nonfiction that is as moving as it is fascinating.