

Grief: A review of Joan Didion's The Year of Magical Thinking

Contributed by Laurie B. Freeman

During the holiday break, there are many opportunities to read, one of my favorite hobbies. One of the books I chose was Joan Didion's The Year of Magical Thinking.

Joan writes of the year after her husband's sudden death when she is also dealing with the serious illness of her only daughter. In addition to the topic of grief, Didion handles the lack of control we feel about the events that occur in our lives; made all the more potent in the illusion that at some point we did have control. Her description of the grieving process beautifully captures its non-linear, non-predictable nature. Ms. Didion is a highly educated published writer yet the denial and pain of the grief is illustrated by her unwillingness to give away John's shoes after his death, "in case he needs them."

Reading this account of grief, brings to mind all of the other things we grieve in our lives. Grief in this case is the loss of a mate through death but the feelings of grief may also occur with the loss of a relationship, such as a divorce or break up. It might also occur when we lose the idea of a relationship that we thought should have been a certain way but wasn't, like a relationship with a parent or a sibling. The grief that occurs when we process these types of losses may not come on as suddenly as that of a death but may be processed in a similar manner. Didion gives a personal voice to the process and her book is as much a love story and tribute to her relationship with her husband as it is a study of her process. There is much to be heard in this book at many levels.