

On Life and Meaning

MARK PERES

Episode 72 – Marjorie Benbow – Giving Thanks

The Other Side of Grief

And now a personal word,

Marjorie Benbow goes by many names: Maggie, Marge, Margie, and Marjorie. I've called her Margie ever since meeting her about a decade ago at an ethics conference at UNC Charlotte. Her many names reflect her many interests. She has multiple projects underway, as I suspect she always has, from colored markers on her craft table to farming flowers and home renovation and helping clients patent inventions to maybe teaching microbiology and anatomy and physiology again. She is devoted to a life of learning and service.

Marjorie is redefining her life after the loss of her husband. She has asked herself hard questions about purpose and meaning. She has restructured her career and passions to live life more freely around the natural laws that guide her: her curiosity, her creativity, finding joy in helping others. Marjorie is working on smaller, but no less significant, moments. She shared with me that Friday nights were movie and popcorn nights with her husband. Marjorie now watches movies alone.

Listening to Marjorie I thought of my own feelings after the death of my dad. I felt great sadness for him when he died, but not for me. I went on with my life without much change or interruption. I managed his death with a stoicism that my dad displayed in his life about what we can and cannot change. But my grief was delayed. I miss him very much. I dream about him. Twenty years on I feel the finality of his loss and wish I could talk to him and he could talk to me. I wish he was here.

Listening to Marjorie I thought of my own marriage and the day that will come when either Laura or I will not be here. I can't get my mind around it. My marriage is the greatest event of my life and a source of endless support and inspiration. We do laugh a lot. Laura is five years younger than me, and we have this joke, that she wants her five years of widowhood now while she is still young enough to enjoy it. She imagines it as an extended weekend pass. Just the kind of humor that keeps our marriage in the moment.

Laura and I have been married for twenty-one years. It feels like a week has gone by. We keep photo albums to remind ourselves just how much we have enjoyed in so short a time.

Marjorie said something during our conversation that I know is true. The other side of grief is gratitude. As sadness fades and we begin to emerge again, the memories we have are good ones. What we thought mattered doesn't anymore. What we didn't appreciate we are grateful for now.

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