

[Skip to main content](#)[University links](#)

## University links

### For staff

- [For Staff](#)
- [Services A-Z](#)
- [Student Education Service](#)

### For students

- [Minerva](#)
- [Mobile app](#)
- [For Students](#)

### Faculties

- [Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures](#)
- [Faculty of Biological Sciences](#)
- [Faculty of Business](#)
- [Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences](#)
- [Faculty of Environment](#)
- [Faculty of Medicine and Health](#)
- [Faculty of Social Sciences](#)
- [Lifelong Learning Centre](#)
- [Language Centre](#)

### Other

- [Staff A-Z](#)
- [Campus map](#)
- [Jobs](#)
- [Alumni](#)
- [Contacts](#)
- [Library](#)
- [IT](#)
- [VideoLeeds](#)
- [Leeds University Union](#)

### Follow us

- [Facebook](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [YouTube](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- [Medium](#)
- [Weibo](#)
- [The Conversation](#)
- [RSS news feed](#)

[Close quicklinks](#)Search Destination [Living With Dying site](#)

[Living With Dying](#)[Menu](#)[Close](#)

- [Home](#)
    - [Home](#)
  - [Blog](#)
  - [Family Historians](#)
    - [Family Historians](#)
    - [Workshop: Family history and academic history](#)
  - [Leeds General Cemetery](#)
  - ['Remembrance' Exhibition](#)
    - ['Remembrance' Exhibition](#)
    - [Events Programme](#)
  - [The Grief Series](#)
1. [Home](#)
  2. [Blog](#)
  3. On continuing bonds, new landscapes and not stepping in poo

# On continuing bonds, new landscapes and not stepping in poo

Category

[Research](#)[The Grief Series](#)

Date

Monday 14 August 2017



In his book 'A grief observed' C.S Lewis wrote:

"Grief is like a long valley, a winding valley where any bend may reveal a totally new landscape. As I've already noted, not every bend does. Sometimes the surprise is the opposite one; you are presented with exactly the same sort of country you thought you had left behind miles ago. That is when you wonder whether the valley isn't a circular trench. But it isn't. There are partial recurrences, but the sequence doesn't repeat".

I feel quite conflicted about journey metaphors. Part of me thinks it edges into 'inspirational quote' territory and makes me want to vomit into my handbag and part of me feels it fairly accurately reflects my experience. I'm choosing for the moment to lean in to the cliché. To wade through the sentimental journey metaphor and hopefully come out the other side rather than dance around the edge of it and then fall arse over teacup into the centre.

When I started The Grief Series in 2010 I wrote a manifesto, a compass to help me avoid getting lost on a journey I knew would be at least a decade's work. I packed in the manifesto the things I thought might be important to survive.

## The Grief Series Manifesto

The Grief series is a quiet rebellion. It is a polite intervention. It aims to create a space where notions of bereavement or grief can be discussed openly. After the outpouring of grief at Princess Diana's death, it was suggested that Britain had begun to embrace a culture of tears. But the tears I see are on screen, and are provoked by reality TV evictions and failures. These tears are a commodity. They keep the ratings up, help Mr Cowell's bank balance and provide a moving ending to each show. They are Oscar nominated tears. They are not the complicated, messy tears of real life. They are an extreme response to the everyday rather than an everyday response to extreme situations. People are just as afraid of the live expression of tears as they ever were. The Grief Series is an attempt to make the expression of grief less scary, for the bereaved and those surrounding or supporting the bereaved. I use my own experiences of bereavement, of course I do, but it is not just about me. I don't want the work to be a form of public therapy for me and yet I am not resistant to the possibility of therapeutic by-products, as long as the work remains open and relevant. I hope that by making space to think, feel and talk our way round grief, with other artists and participants/audiences, that there may be positive emotional and social outcomes. It is about reaching people. The interdisciplinary nature of the work recognises that to reach different people you need to use different forms, put the work in a variety of contexts: a theatre, a public space, on the web, or in a gallery to allow people to express grief in different ways. It might at times be confusing. It might be funny or sad or frustrating. It will be bold and it is a call to arms... in the politest way possible.

A past version of me wrote that manifesto. A me from quite a while ago. Now seems like a good time to look back over my shoulder at the journey so far, consult my compass and then continue on.

I am just at the start of Part 6 of The Grief Series. It will be a pilgrimage between three sites of personal remembrance: Glasgow, Brownsea Island on the south coast, and Hamburg, Germany. In 2002 I scattered my mother's ashes, probably illegally, on Brownsea Island. There is no lasting monument. I have never been back. If my mum was alive now, we would spend time together. I would arrange to see her. But we don't always do that with people once they are dead. But what if we did? I'm going on a journey to spend time with the people I've lost. To revisit old haunts and see where they hang out now. I'm going to travel between three places and visit three people: my mum, my dad and my brother. A family holiday with three dead people. I know it sounds odd.... it is. I am. The journey might be tough, or confusing or funny. I might get annoyed with my dad, we haven't spent much time together so I don't know. The project will ask where the memory of the dead live, whether it may be in gravestones, in temporary shrines by roadsides, in people's tweets or on their Facebook pages. In a world where we are increasingly mobile, what part does geography play in our mourning rituals or acts of remembrance? As well as formal memorials such as gravestones, how do bus stops, supermarkets and pubs become sites of pilgrimage and remembrance?

I think the manifesto has been a good compass to me, even if it is old and a little worn now. I set off on the journey of making Grief Series alone. My experience of losing people had often made me feel alone, even if I wasn't. But slowly people joined me. 'Just me' became 'a few of us'.... made up of artists, participants, professionals.... lots of different words for people. And the alive people I met introduced me to dead people they loved by sharing their memories: of dead parents, dead grandparents, dead children, dead siblings, dead pets. And the few of us were now a crowd. And that crowd became larger and now that crowd is what I playfully call Team Grief.

So far Team Grief have:

- Dressed as elephants in Hotels up and down the country
- Created a nationally touring photography exhibition for empty houses in collaboration with fifty members of the public from 7 to 75 years old
- Built an angry Funfair called The Unfair for town squares, promenades and public spaces
- Prompted lads to ring their mums and turn over new leaves

- Collaborated with Imams, Rabbi's and Humanist Celebrants
- Impersonated Leonardo Di Caprio
- Eaten a lot of Jammy Dodgers and drunk nearly 100 litres of port in the process

People ask whether making work about death is depressing, 'The circular trench' that C.S Lewis fears? I'll admit I've had the odd wade through a swamp of despondency but my journey is constantly refreshed and reinvigorated by new voices, new perspectives. People bringing more food for thought. I'm looking forward to Laura joining me. Having never collaborated with a historian, I'm excited by the possibilities. I hope that by examining the past we can both reinforce continuing bonds with the dead and reframe our relationship to the future. Laura is a generous companion. I have no doubt she will point out new vistas, and ideas as the landscape keeps revealing new surprises..... and hopefully she'll stop me from treading in poo.... metaphorically and literally. Maybe she'll even help me avoid journey metaphors.

## Footer navigation

## Site information

- © 2025 University of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT
- [Terms and conditions](#)
- [Copyright](#)
- [Accessibility](#)
- [Privacy](#)