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ROBERT NEIMEYER

GRIEF AND THE QUEST FOR MEANING:
AN INTERVIEW by POLYXENI STYLIANOU

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Abstract: Professor Robert A. Neimeyer, renowned for pioneering the theory of grief as a process of meaning-making, stands as a compelling illustration of how the lives of professionals can profoundly shape their work, and conversely, how their work can impact their lives. In his interview, Bob masterfully transforms what could have been a standard interview into an engaging and relaxing conversation, infused with the essence of his expertise in the realm of loss and grief. He shares personal experiences of loss and grief and explores how life choices and work went hand in hand. He talks about his motivation to enter the field and illustrates poetically how he carried the weight that grief bestowed upon him, along with how he reflects on those existential experiences of loss. He shares his thoughts about grief therapy and how changing the past is not only feasible but also therapeutic. Additionally, he delves into the role of faith and spirituality in the transition through loss and articulates how he envisions being remembered.

Keywords: Loss and Grief; Meaning-Making Theory; Trauma and Transition; Grief Therapy.

Robert A. Neimeyer, PhD, is Professor Emeritus of the Department of Psychology, University of Memphis, and maintains an active consulting and coaching practice. He also directs the Portland Institute for Loss and Transition, which provides online and onsite training internationally in grief therapy. He has published 35 books, including *New Techniques of Grief Therapy: Bereavement and Beyond* and *The Handbook of Grief Therapies*, the latter with Edith Steffen and Jane Milman. The author of over 600 articles and book chapters, he is currently working to advance a more adequate theory of grieving as a meaning-making process, both in his published work and through his frequent professional workshops for national and international audiences. Neimeyer is the Editor of the respected international journal, *Death Studies*, and served as President of the Association for Death Education and Counseling. In recognition of his scholarly contributions, he has been granted the Distinguished Research Award, the Distinguished Teaching Award, and the Eminent Faculty Award by the University of Memphis, elected Chair of the International Work Group

on Death, Dying, and Bereavement, and given the Research Recognition, Clinical Practice and Lifetime Achievement Awards by the Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC). Most recently, he has been granted Lifetime Achievement Awards from both ADEC and the International Network for Personal Meaning.

The above is a brief resume of the interviewee featured in this issue of *Symbol-e*. It is a privilege and an honor to have Robert Neimeyer share some of his time with us. This privilege is not only due to his impressive resume but, more importantly, because a scientist of his caliber is willingly devoting his valuable time to share his thoughts and experiences. As the interviewer, I would like to take this opportunity to share a personal note about this remarkable man. When discussing the main theme of this issue with Panayiotis, the editor of *Symbol-e*, which explores how the lives of professionals influence their work and vice versa, Professor Neimeyer was one of the first individuals who came to mind. His writing has greatly influenced my research on loss and grief in education. When I had the chance to meet him in person in Alba Ioulia, Romania, in 2016, I was astounded by the fact that this legendary figure in the field of grief was so humble, kind, and supportive. I have had the privilege of attending some of his workshops, both in person and online. Based on my personal experience, I can confidently say that his approach to grief in his research and writing aligns harmoniously with the way Bob lives his life and interacts with those around him. Interviewing Robert Neimeyer is an immense honor, and I would like to express once again how deeply appreciative I am for this opportunity.

—How would you describe yourself, Professor Robert Neimeyer? Besides your academic and professional expertise as a grief therapist, who is the person behind the name Robert Neimeyer?

—Well, Robert Neimeyer is one version of the universal human being. So along with everyone who is reading this page, along with you and all of us, I'm also a person whose life is littered with losses of different kinds as we navigate this earthly odyssey. I suppose what defines my life in part is how I have accommodated the losses and tried to make sense of them. I certainly am more than just a psychologist and more than just a person who has known loss and grief. I also have played the game of racquetball and I'm learning the game of pickleball. I write poetry, especially at moments when I feel despair and sadness. I enjoy drawing, painting, reading, and writing. All of these are important to me, and I like giving my

body the chance to exercise. I especially love the time spent with people, especially creative people like yourself!

—*Thank you for this comment.*

—Well, thank you for the conversation. It greatly enriches life to be in the presence of others who can inspire me through their own way of being in the world and what they bring to the experience of being human.

—*What motivated you to work in the field of grief?*

—It's interesting that you asked that question because it comes just 10 minutes after I was writing a kind of personal vignette or story about my responses in the aftermath of my father's suicide when I was not quite 12 years old. Yesterday, in the Portland Institute of Loss and Transition, which is our institute for providing global training in bereavement support and grief therapy, we had a presentation by a wonderful guest presenter named Linita Matthew and she presented a method for expressive storytelling around sticky, difficult and dark experiences of loss. She encouraged each of us then to participate in that. And I did so. Just before our interview, I was typing up some of the successive draughts of my own story of my father's dying, and focused on a particular moment when I knew my mother was cleaning out the house and throwing everything that had belonged to my father into a large metal trash can. I went out to the can tearfully and was taking out some of his ties and clothing out to keep them. To make a long story short, by that evening my mother had me place them back in the trash can and seal it forever. So that was the experience I was processing in writing. That's an indirect answer to your question. I think my own early experiences of loss and especially my dad's death, my dad's suicide, placed me, as the eldest of three children in the family, onto a path where I needed to grapple with the reality of death in life. To find some way to make sense of it and to respond to it constructively and so, I think, across a personal and professional lifetime, I find myself continuing to do that.

—*So, did you know from the very beginning that you would be working in this field, or did that realization come later?*

—That's the right question to ask, Xenia, because we can be moved by forces beyond our understanding. At least that was true for me at the age of 11, 12, 15, 18, 23. It really wasn't until I was in my mid 20s that I began to understand myself in these terms, even though I was drawn to study Philosophy and Psychology in our high school on through to university. I

began volunteering in a suicide and crisis intervention centre and ultimately teaching classes while I was a graduate student in the psychology of death and dying, but I didn't connect any of those, particularly, to my own experience. It took another decade to become very clear to me that the mission was personal as well as professional.

—How has your research and work with grief influenced your subsequent life choices?

—I don't know that I can separate the choices and the working. They seem to go hand in hand. As a therapist I was constantly engaged in deep dialogue with people who were experiencing losses through death or non-death causes – such as through life-altering illness, the dissolution of relationships, career loss or transition or perhaps migration under difficult circumstances and the loss of culture and all the ways that loss is a frequent visitor to our lives. I found myself deeply interested in engaging people in dialogue about what it meant to them, what they were discovering in the course of living through such transitions. As we have those conversations, I find that by naturally responding in the moment and then in the larger scale of my own choices and lifetime, I began to deepen into my own loss experiences, to open to them. And so it doesn't feel as if A causes B, but the A and B are part of an organic process of unfolding or becoming. Just as water running down a slope or a hill will find its own path, naturally, it doesn't have to make a decision at each point, which way to turn. I think that's how I have evolved to become whoever or whatever I am now.

—Were there any moments when you considered changing your job? Working with grief can be incredibly challenging, as it involves continuously dealing with a subject that often brings sadness. While we can find meaning in this work, the weight of it can become overwhelming at times.

—Well, even though you might think I'd become a very sad and morose person, in fact, I feel very joyful and very grateful. I can even be fun to be around! So, I don't find that holding a certain amount of grief weighs me down. Instead, like the ballast in an old sailing ship, the heaviness in the lower hull makes the ship steadier. It's less likely to capsize, and I feel like that's how I carry any weight that grief is giving me. It simply is kind of a balancing element in my life, and it leaves plenty of room for joy and connection, exploration, creativity, excitement, and curiosity. For me, even though I've spent—gosh, what would it be now?—well over 45 years working alongside people who are experiencing various forms of significant loss, I also have had the opportunity to witness their growth as human beings, the rediscovery of the authentic ways that they can live now in the wake of life changing loss.

And that's very inspirational. I also have to acknowledge that I do not do the work of therapy 30 or 40 hours a week, as some therapists do. Probably more typical for me has been between maybe 5 and perhaps 20 hours a week, meaning that I have time to do other things; to teach, to supervise, to write, to do research, to travel, to speak. All of these provide, I think, a natural balance and the chance to integrate these first person, emotional, very evocative experiences with clients, which have continued throughout my entire career. In a larger frame, I have time to reflect upon these existential experiences and attempt to formulate them, and that's a gift. So, it hasn't been too heavy.

—We can say that the primary challenge for a grief therapist is to find the balance you described between work and personal life.

—Yes, I think that's true. In some ways, that's the challenge facing every client, too. That is to find a balance between grief work and life, between, on the one hand, being willing to explore the subtle and sometimes traumatic implications of the loss for life on the one hand, but also to find a way of reengaging life and living with fullness and emotional investment. So that balance, attending to loss and attending to life, this necessarily faces therapists as human beings.

—Your response leads me to the next question, which pertains to the necessity of grief therapy. Is it essential to undergo such therapy? I recall you mentioning that the past can be altered, which intrigued me and held significant meaning. Does grief therapy aid grievers in transforming their perspective on the past or in finding equilibrium in their present, as you currently describe?

—It's a very good question, Xenia. To respond to the first part of your question, if grief therapy is necessary, the answer is certainly not! In the larger scheme of things, people have been losing and living in light of loss for as long as we have been a species, and indeed before that. In our evolutionary development, every living thing will die. When we are creatures oriented to attachment, really wired or programmed for attachment in a world of impermanence, we will experience loss repeatedly and we will be affected by it. For the great majority of human history, we've managed to adapt to that circumstance without grief therapists. Grief therapists only have been around for a few decades, and psychotherapy itself has scarcely been around for 100 years. So, in the longer frame, it's a very brief contribution to the human condition. And, of course, the role of religion and culture, the support of social

systems, families, villages—this is traditionally how people have accommodated loss and it still is.

Grief therapy is most helpful in those cases where people feel stuck in their grief in some way—when it goes on and on and on interminably, or where it gets worse and worse and worse across time rather than better. Ample research indicates that about 10% of people may struggle with that kind of prolonged and functionally limiting or disabling kind of grief. That's really where grief therapy is helpful, in identifying the places people get stuck and then trying to help them find a way over, under, around or through those blockages that keep them from grieving adaptively.

Grief itself is an adaptive response. It's a way for us to slow down and be motivated by our pain. We begin to reappraise our connections, our investments in the world, our beliefs, our way of being, and then gradually revise them. Grief is an adaptive process that sometimes becomes maladaptive when we find ourselves unable to move forward in the process.

To come to the second part of your great question, what do we help people do with grief?, there are a lot of ways of responding to that. The general one that you mentioned, I think, is very relevant. We feel, especially in the context of death and loss, that nothing will return the world for which we yearn, at least in a literal sense. Our loved ones will not come back to life. We can feel a great sense of fatalism about that, a great sense of devastation and loneliness. Sometimes unfinished business arises from the nature of the relationship that now feels as if it cannot be addressed or resolved, as in cases when we experience conflict or hurt regarding some aspect of the person's life shared with us, or maybe our sense of guilt of not having done things we should have.

But my comment that you remembered correctly is that, in a way, *the only thing we can change is the past*. The present is just an instant, and it's gone. The future is only a hypothesis. The only thing we have that we can change and work with is the past. We change it by finding in it new significance, new meaning. We reconstruct the past, in order to reconstruct the future. We do it across the bridge of the present moment. So, I see grief therapy as offering those present moment opportunities for deeply reviewing and revising our narratives of who we are, who we have been and who we are becoming. It helps when we can do this in the presence of an empathic and compassionate person. Sometimes a therapist can be a great help to those who are suffering, and are undertaking that process.

—*And we can say that this is a concise allusion to your theory on meaning-making, correct?*

—Yes, it is. It's good of you to notice that.

—*As a teacher myself and educator I know that every relationship is about teaching and learning. The teacher is not just instructing the student. Both of them are teachers. And in an Atlanta workshop you mentioned very clearly that therapists may be specialists in grief, but the real experts are the ones who have the experience—the clients. So, the question is, what did you as a specialist, learn from the experts you work with?*

—I learned what people need, in a given moment of their evolution as a human being or a grieving person. I'm looking for, listening—listening with my ears and listening with my eyes—to the non-verbal expressions and gestures that often say as much or more than the words they speak, about what they need in a given moment. Perhaps it is to have a stronger sense of connection with the loved one who has been lost. Perhaps it is to find a new way forward in their life to embrace a new opportunity. Perhaps it is to resolve a dispute with others in the family system who are grieving in different ways. In all of this and more, they need to somehow find a way to make sense of the loss itself, take in the story of the dying, particularly when the loss was sudden, premature, violent or traumatic as in suicide or homicide or accident. In all of these cases, people are trying to wrap their minds and hearts around what happened, to somehow find a way of integrating it into their life story. I'm listening for specifically, what does Xenia *need* right now, in this moment? And what is she *ready* for now? These are two different things, though. For example, let's imagine that you had lost your spouse or partner and after some months of really grieving that loss and reorganising the family as best you could, you're feeling a deep loneliness. There's a deep need for intimacy and companionship. But maybe you're not ready to do anything about that yet, in terms of opening your heart to another relation. So, we're looking for where need and readiness align. At that point, we have a way of moving forward that is relevant to the client and instructive for me.

Another way of phrasing this is that as therapists, *we lead from one step behind*. Our clients always unconsciously know exactly what they need and how they need it. Our role is to learn from them what this next step might be, the next feasible step. Maybe it is a small one. Maybe it's a bold one. Then we try to collaborate to learn how to make that step. The client in this formulation is an expert on her experience. I am the specialist consultant on the process of change. Each of us contributes to finding and performing a way forward.

—*Was there a particular story from one of your clients that profoundly touched you, one that you always remember? In your books you use many stories to illustrate theories and our human experiences, but I'm curious if there is a specific story that had a profound impact on you.*

—There are so many! My typical response to a session of therapy when people are moving deeply into their pain or their hope, when they feel absolutely stuck, or whether they feel like they had just made an enormous step that is very inspiring, my standard response is one of tears. Tears of empathic connection or tears of amazement at what they are able to achieve. Being moved is almost a precondition, I think, for therapeutic encounters. We need to allow ourselves to be touched a little. That's why you read many stories about my clients—because I'm moved by many of those stories.

So, if I were to think of just one that is striking for me... Well, I think about one that I wrote about not long ago and this was a young man from India, living in the United States, whose father was a successful chemical engineer. It was expected in some way that this young man would become someone who took over the company, but his own path was very different. He was more interested in the arts and the humanities than the sciences. So, there was some tension. Even though the family was a loving and cohesive one, and the father was nurturing and kind, there was this growing tension and rift. My client studied acting and the arts, which were very foreign to the father. The younger man was looking, as he said, for *his own name*, not just being his father's son. And at some point, he opened a brewery to make beer and it was a successful enterprise, a microbrewery, as we say. But the growth of the business required that he take on a major loan of money in order to develop the business further. The father strongly advised against this. He was very insistent that this is a bad move. “Being a brewer is not helping people, alcohol is not a good thing in people's lives and here you are going into that in order to do it...” The two of them had a fight after which the father suffered a fatal heart attack. The young man plunged into a deep and guilty and complicated grief.

The most inspiring moment in our single-session online therapy came when I invited him to essentially open the door to his father, to allow his father to join us in the session, symbolically, occupying a place in his mind's eye. I invited the young man to close his eyes and to envision his father just as he would be if he accepted his son's invitation to come and have a meaningful conversation with him. He did that kind of visualisation of the father—

what he would be wearing, how he would be seated, where they would be meeting. So, we set the stage just as if for a play, with his eyes closed. Then he conjured the image of his father, and he began to find the words to speak of his grief, to speak of his love, to speak of his guilt. Then, at my direction, he would clear the slate, meaning to clear the screen of mental imagery and step into being his father and respond to his son. He began as himself, just earnestly pouring out his heart and asking for forgiveness. Then, in his father's voice, he provided reassurance of love and admiration, of ongoing connection. And as I facilitated the conversation between the two, prompting him as father to say to his son how he would be with him now, in response, the father smiled and said, "You know, in the garden behind their home that we planted together, you will see me. Each evening, we would sit on the deck behind our home and drink a cup of masala tea. You will meet with me there. You know I will be with you. I am proud of the man you are becoming". And as I asked the son to respond to that, he deepened the sense of apology, but also his commitment to being a part of the family.

It was deeply moving. He was crying profusely, tears of gratitude for what he had heard his father say. And I was moved to tears myself. So, as we moved out of that conversation, I slowly encouraged him to release the images and brought him back into his chair, to his body at the present moment, in his home on the other side of the screen from me. Then he was able to take a kind of meta perspective. He began to make sense of the relation with his father in a new and deeper and ongoing way, forming a much more secure continuing bond with his father, one that supported him in his grief and the reorganisation of his life. So that would be one such moment when I felt myself moved by admiration and awe and what he had accomplished in the span of an hour.

—I'm sure you have encountered numerous moments like these, as you mentioned earlier. I would like to inquire about the role of faith and spirituality in the grieving process. How does faith and spirituality assist grievers, and what alternatives are available for individuals who do not have faith in religion or spirituality?

—Well, I think it has a substantial role, sometimes a crucial role for many who are people of faith, whose beliefs provide a kind of core sense of identity. For them, their spirituality often connects them to a community as well as to some version of a benevolent God or universe. Of course, human expressions of spirituality are notably diverse. Not everybody is Greek Orthodox! In the Abrahamic tradition of Judaism, Christianity, including Catholicism, and

related expressions in Islam, where we have a monotheistic belief system, there is a single God, most commonly, and especially within the Christian frame, the normative experience of people is that God is seen as benevolent, as omniscient. That is, all knowing, omnipotent, all powerful. This spiritual frame then raises questions about how such a God could allow abject tragedy to happen—when it is my child who dies by overdose, when we're in an automobile accident, when it is my partner who dies by suicide, or when my mother, who is in her 50s, contracts a the terminal cancer that cannot be reversed. Then deep questions can arise for of a spiritual sort.

These can be compounded by the response of the spiritual community, which sometimes will provide a great deal of support for people, and at other times, provides it only temporarily. In many Christian traditions, for example, at least in North America, the assumption may be that the deceased has gone to heaven and so there's no reason for the living to grieve. They are with God—our child is in the hands of the Lord. What could be better than that? Indeed, it's sometimes presented as a celebration. A kind of homegoing, as it's called. And so sometimes the ideology of the faith tradition will not be comforting to us. It feels like a too simple a response to a complex circumstance.

I want to emphasize that spirituality, like all secular philosophies, can be an enormous aid to helping us understand the place of suffering in human life. Virtually all religions arise in order to give some kind of answers to the questions about what death is. What is the meaning of life? Why do we suffer and how do we bear with that suffering, or maybe even be transformed by it? In that frame it can be very helpful.

But ours also, especially in the developed West, is increasingly a secularised world. The old faith traditions may ring hollow for many people, or are abandoned altogether as irrelevant. In those cases, we seek our own kind of personal philosophies. Maybe we borrow from the Greek Stoics in order to figure out how to move forward in a world that is difficult, or perhaps we imagine a realm of reason like Socrates might have done, and orient our life along those lines. We seek a way forward. Maybe we adopt an existential view or maybe we develop our own personal philosophies that have little to do with conscious or classic ones, but we find things that have meaning for us. We weave a belief system that makes everyday life possible. And it's this that we count on, and that we also need to sometimes challenge and change when life takes a turn in a difficult direction, one that challenges and sometimes shatters those same core beliefs. So, even as a secular therapist, I find myself often dealing

with clients as they contend with spiritual issues. Where was God in my child's cancer diagnosis and death? These are profound questions, and they cannot be ignored simply because my belief system and the client's may be different.

—So, many individuals find their own personal philosophy or sources of support to find the strength to carry on with their lives. But what about those who choose not to continue with their lives?

—Well, of course my father was one such, dying by suicide as he did, and people can relinquish life in that sudden, abrupt way. In the US that's most often done by firearms because we are a culture that is in love with firearms and there are more guns in America than there are people. So, we are very deviant on the world scale in this way. But people in other cultures die at a similar or higher rate. They do it by leaping from buildings or taking medication or overdosing intentionally, all of these ways and more. Sometimes life becomes seemingly unliveable. The pain that we experience is too great to bear. We essentially are trapped by a vision of the world and a set of attachments to people and circumstances that now are broken by loss. And we may feel like it is too much to repair or replace or reconstruct. At such moments we can choose to end our lives rather than continue our pain. That certainly is a case where a competent therapist can and should be a valuable ally in finding a way of addressing those deep needs and questions.

—I recently had a conversation which touched upon a difficult subject. It involved a situation where a wife had died by suicide, and her husband, who has not opted for grief therapy... I am pondering the profound impact of losing someone to suicide, as it is an incredibly traumatic experience. In your opinion, is it possible for someone to find meaning or gather the strength to cope with this loss without professional help?

—I do think so. I am a big believer in the value of therapy, but that doesn't mean it's the answer for everyone. It can make a profound contribution to people's reorganisation of life or reinvestment, reinvention in life. But it is not the only way forward. What we need is in some way to access the compassionate attention and support of others in practical terms. Just how do we get through the day in the aftermath of this? How do we get the children to school? How do we get food on the table? How do we negotiate with our employer for the time off? We need to be able to get our feet under us again. But we also need people who can listen deeply to the difficult emotions and stories and experiences that most people draw away from or provide simple answers to, as if they could find a few words that would make it

all better. What we need are people who are willing to stand in to just how bad it is, listen more deeply and longer than most folks will, and those don't have to be therapists. But sometimes it can help to supplement the resources of a family or social system with some professional help.

—Is this what we refer to as the importance of grief literacy in society, where people learn how to engage in conversations, overcome their limitations, ask questions, and actively listen?

—Yeah, that's beautiful. I think it's a wonderful phrasing of it. Grief literacy. You are someone who teaches reading, and who understands that the goal of literacy is not just about reading texts written by others, but to read the text of our own lives and identity, to become more literate in our own emotions. To be able to name them, to claim them, to make sense of them. We're not only looking for ways to decode the symbols on a page and make them into meaningful words, sentences, paragraphs, and stories. We're looking for ways to decode the troubling images and stories and fragments of experience in our lives and weave those into speakable tales that can be shared, heard, and ultimately revised. So, I do love the idea of grief literacy and it does suggest a role beyond grief therapy for constructing cultural frames for making death and loss speakable, to find words where none easily appear. Of course, words alone, despite my love of language and yours, may not be enough. This is one reason we often address themes of grief and loss in other symbol systems... whether it is a symphony by a classic composer, a requiem mass, for example, by Mozart, or whether it is a painting that explores issues of grief, loss, transition, or a novel that draws on creative writing to explore real human experiences in the lives of imaginary characters. Poetry is personal form that I practise and enjoy in this regard. There are many ways of attempting to find meaning in our seemingly meaningless lives.

—Even in understanding silence?

—Yes, yes. I love that. Thank you for introducing that, because it may be that in growing comfortable with silence and relaxing our need to make meaning we may actually find it more readily. Perhaps the meanings are already here, if we just grow quiet and listen for them.

—*And now, for the final question, dear Bob, it revolves around you once more. How would you prefer to be remembered?*

—Well, I hope people will remember me with a smile. Maybe recalling a conversation or some words I spoke or wrote, but in a way that has relevance to their ongoing lives. Ultimately, we will all be forgotten, and that's an okay thing. But I think as long as we are carried in the minds and hearts of others, our lives are extended proportionately. Not infinitely, but the echo of our lives, I hope, will be a welcome one in the lives of those who go forward. So that's my modest hope—not for immortality, but a little life extension beyond the grave!

—*I will remember you as a poet.*

— Well, you are a kind person to say so.

—*No, it just occurred to me during our conversation, and I understand that it's not a conventional interview. It's more of a poetic inquiry. Nevertheless, thank you very much for this interview. I truly appreciate the time you've dedicated.*

—Would you like to close with a poem? I'm thinking of one. Here's one that I wrote, that has relevance to what we have been talking about, especially with the allusions to suicide loss, and the couple that you described, and my lost father.

A few years ago I attended a large conference, a couple thousand people, at the American Association of Suicidology, and one of the things that was organized was a small breakout group offered for people who were themselves survivors of suicide loss. And about a dozen of us then convened in this workshop space, where we were given different kinds of instructions to do a free write, that is, an unconstrained kind of writing prompted by a certain theme. Across the successive versions, each time we had just a very brief period of 5 minutes to write something and then to share it aloud prompted by a title like, “*I remember*”. I was very moved by the experience and participated in it. In the last round the prompt given by the workshop organisers was simply the phrase “*You make me happy*”. And so I took that as the title of the poem, and I had five minutes. Here's what came in those 5 minutes.

You make me happy
when you share your sadness,

open your heart's pages
and read the small print.
You give me the gift
of your truth,
unvarnished, rough-hewn
from the timbers of your life.

This is how it is
for us now,
as we stand in the ashes,
only see beauty
where it is laid bare,
stripped of ornamentation,
just the sturdy posts
that still stand,
nudged back into place,
re-centered by other hands.

They give no protection
from the howling wind,
but they endure,
and provide a place of meeting,
a place to rebuild.¹

¹ A. R. Neimeyer, "You make me happy." *Death Studies* 41(8) (2017), 551.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2017.1333359>.