

Writing an autobiographical, issues-oriented column

1. Open with an anecdote — the more powerful, the better.
2. Provide context and state (or give clues) about the main issue.
3. Incorporate conversation, either internal or external.
4. State the issue.
5. Relate to the bigger issue. Embed a hyperlink to the research.
6. Drop the mic with your takeaway — give a call to action.

*“[Death and Birds](#)” by Paige Kluba, The Roar, April 10, 2025
2025 College Media Association Pinnacle Award: Best Column, 2nd Place*

Death wasn't something I was used to.

I had never lost someone I loved until my 19-year-old cat passed away on Nov. 24, 2017.

Yes, I still remember the date.

Five days after I had turned 14, we had to put down my childhood cat due to her increased kidney failure. She had been with me through four moves and the entirety of my life, totaling far too many bird-watching sessions to count. I will always remember saying goodbye to her and not knowing how to deal with the loss.

Doing the only thing I knew how to do, nerdy teenage me went home and watched “A Very Potter Musical” to cheer myself up. And then I watched “A Very Potter Musical, The Sequel.”

Since then, I have lost grandparents, aunts and cousins, and although the occasional “A Very Potter Musical” soundtrack cheers me up, I have yet to figure out how to get rid of the grief. The [National Institute on Aging](#) (NIA) suggests having a support system and support books, but I have a strong support system, and the “Harry Potter” books closely align with the musical. Grief still finds a way to linger with the loss of a loved one.

The NIA also recommends that people make dinner plans and participate in their favorite activities, but the truth is, life goes on no matter what loss we may face, and even in my favorite activities, I will still think of the loved ones I've lost. So maybe a scientific institution doesn't have the answer for me.

With the rise of social media, especially after the pandemic, utilizing platforms such as YouTube, [Reddit](#) and [X](#) to face [hard conversations about grief](#) have become increasingly popular. On Jan. 17, 2025, FeedSpot released a list of [50 Grief YouTube Channels](#), some of which have more than 20,000 subscribers.

Clearly I'm not the only one facing this problem.

Some of the influencers promote self-care. Some have psychology backgrounds and try to explain why grief feels the way it does. All focus on supporting each other during tough times.

Still, I cannot watch a YouTube video or Instagram Reel that encourages me to analyze my grief. Sometimes, I just want a distraction instead of a dissection. Virtual therapists, influencers and people who did not even know the people I lost tell me that I need to sit in my grief and probe my feelings to understand why my heart is in pain. I don't need a social media post or a self-help book to tell me why my heart hurts. Losing someone is not supposed to be easy. My heart doesn't have to heal in record time. Truthfully, it doesn't have to heal at all.

What I have realized is over time the grief will lessen. The world will keep spinning, and from time to time, signs will appear showing how your loved ones remain in your heart, even if it burns for just a moment.

My parents always told me that whenever a cardinal appears, a loved one is there to visit.

Every day I look out my window and see a cardinal perched quietly on a branch or a windowsill and feel the slight burn of the reminder that my loved ones haven't really left.

I'm sure my cat is watching me too.