

Hi guys, it's Barry with a really exciting announcement for you.
As listeners of the show will know, one of the reasons that this exists in the first place is to embody and promote honest, frank conversations and good faith debates, both of which feel increasingly rare in our polarized country.
That is why I'm so excited to announce that the Free Press, along with FIRE, the nation's leading defender of free speech rights, are hosting a live debate on a very sexy and contentious subject on Wednesday, September 13th at 7 p.m. at the historic Ace Theatre in downtown Los Angeles.
The proposition? The sexual revolution has failed.
Arguing for the proposition is co-host of the podcast Redscare, Anacachian, and author of the case against the sexual revolution, Louise Perry.
They're going to be facing off against musician and producer Grimes, and writer and co-host of the podcast A Special Place in Hell, Sarah Hader.
I'm going to be the moderator and I couldn't be more excited.
This is going to be an amazing night.
It's a chance to meet other people in the real world who also like thinking for themselves and who listen to this show.
You can get your tickets now by going to [thefp.com backslash debates](https://thefp.com/backslashdebates).
Again, that's [thefp.com slash debates](https://thefp.com/slashdebates).
I can't wait to meet some of you guys in person.
And now, here's the show.
I'm Barry Weiss, and this is Honestly.
How many times have you not known what to say to a friend going through a horrible loss?
How many times have you found yourself saying the phrase to someone in acute grief, there are no words.
Or perhaps worse, not saying anything at all, because you just don't know what would be right.
I have a friend, not a close friend, but a friend I really like whose husband, a man larger than life, suddenly died.
And like everyone who heard the news, I was in shock.
And I'm really embarrassed about this.
I put off reaching out to her because I simply didn't know what to say.
I wrote dozens of texts and deleted them before finally settling on something that I didn't think was good enough.
And I felt that anything I said would be inadequate and somehow would add to her suffering.
My guest today says that's all wrong.
He says we have to find the words.
And that the way our society treats grief and people in grief needs a radical reimagining.
He of all people knows.
Four years ago, Colin Campbell and his wife, Gail, were driving to Joshua Tree with their two teenage kids when they were T-boned by a drunk and high driver going 90 miles an hour.

Colin and Gail survived.
Their two children, Ruby and Hart, did not.
How do you live after that nightmare?
How do you support a friend, a colleague, a brother or a sister
who literally does not know how to go on?
Now, if you're listening to this,
God forbid you or someone you love has experienced such a horrific tragedy.
But the reality is that every single one of us
has experienced in our lives or will experience grief.
That's just part of what the deal is.
That's part of what it means to be human.
And that's certainly what it means to love another person.
All of which is why I think today's conversation with Colin is so important.
His book, Finding the Words,
tells the story not only of the weeks and months following Ruby and Hart's death,
but also breaks down our society's misconceptions about grief,
which he calls the grief orthodoxy,
and provides practical advice for a radically different approach to grief,
one that is more truthful and real, connected and loving.
By now, you've noticed that today's episode is a different sort of conversation
than the one we often do here, politics, culture, debates, all of which I love.
But when I think about the name of this show, honestly,
this feels like exactly the kind of conversation we also should be having here.
People say to the grieving,
there are no words because they're too scared to confront the hard conversation.
As Colin writes in his book, it acts as a perfect conversation killer.
This empty phrase immediately ends any chance of dialogue about loss and mourning.
It encapsulates all that is wrong with how our society handles grief.
But if you listen to the show, you know that we believe in having the hard conversation.
This conversation really touched me.
It really resonates with me, and I hope it does for you too.
We'll be right back.
If my dogs could order what they want for dinner,
they would choose pillows and my sneakers 10 times out of 10.
But their second choice, I'm sure, would be food from the farmer's dog.
The farmer's dog is fresh, healthy food made with whole meat and veggies
and cooked in human-grade kitchens to preserve its nutritional value.
Say goodbye to dry-stale pellets. It's 2023.
If your dog isn't on a custom meal plan, you're doing it wrong.
The farmer's dog recipes are developed by vets,
and they're personalized to your pet.
Provide your dog's details, and for as little as \$2 a day,
they'll receive customized meals delivered right to your doorstep.
Meals arrived in pre-portioned, ready-to-serve packs,

and they're delivered on your schedule.

Now for the fun part.

My listeners get 50% off their first box of fresh, healthy food at thefarmersdog.com slash berry.

Plus, you'll get free shipping.

Just go to thefarmersdog.com slash berry to get 50% off.

That's thefarmersdog.com slash berry

to get 50% off your first box and free shipping.

Colin Campbell, welcome to Honestly.

Oh, thank you, Barry.

I wonder if you could start by telling us a little bit about your family.

Tell us about your wife, Gail,

and tell me about your two children, Hart and Ruby.

Yeah, thanks for asking.

So my wife, Gail, and I, we met in graduate school for theater directing.

So we're like theater nerds.

And then she went on to write for television as a comedy writer.

So she's very funny.

And I was a director as well.

So she directs and writes for television and film.

And I always thought I didn't want to have kids until I met Gail.

And then suddenly I wanted to get married and have kids with her.

So we created the family that we had always dreamed of, a boy and a girl.

And they were sweet and kind and loving.

And our whole family was kind and loving.

And always lived in LA?

Yes, yes.

So we raised them in the house that they were born in.

And that was powerful.

We like house hunting.

So Gail and I, we would go to like open houses.

And Ruby and Hart would always be like shocked.

Like, no, we can never leave.

What are you doing?

Why are you even looking in another house?

And we're like, because it's fun.

Because maybe no.

So they were very attached to the house that they grew up in.

So as someone who wasn't sure that you wanted to become a father, what most surprised you about becoming a parent?

Well, that it was so fun.

That I loved being a dad.

That I loved all the ridiculous like spending time with little kids.

And I told my brother like, I don't like kids.

I don't like my kids.
Two-year-olds in general did not appeal to me,
but my two-year-olds did.
And so I love spending time with two-year-olds.
But then when they became three, I was like, oh, thank God.
I love when they kept getting older.
And that's extra heartbreak,
which is that I was just so excited to have them be adults.
That in the end, we were just entering a new dynamic,
it felt like, where we didn't have to actively parent so much.
Like they did their own homework.
They helped out with dinner.
They went to bed at a reasonable hour.
They were just like, we were just got to hang out together and play,
which is so beautiful.
So let's go then to the events of June 12th, 2019,
events that are unthinkable really to any parent.
And yet the unthinkable happened to you and Gail that day.
Tell us about what happened.
Yeah.
Well, we were going to Joshua Tree, for those of you who don't know,
it's like a two and a half hours east of Los Angeles in the Haimojave Desert.
And we had just made an offer on a house there,
it's like a getaway vacation home,
because all four of us loved going to Joshua Tree.
There's amazing rock formations,
and we just loved scrambling all over them.
So when we found this house,
it was like this is like a dream come true for us as a family.
And we were headed back there at night,
because in the following morning, I had meetings with somebody
who was going to maybe see if they could put a pool in for us.
And Ruby had already chosen the spot for the pool.
And it was a joyous ride.
It was sort of like a high point for us as a family.
And once we crested the hill up to the high desert,
it was only about another 15 minutes, 20 minutes to the house,
when a drunken high driver, a repeat DOI offender,
going 40 miles above the speed limit, t-boned us.
And the point of impact was the rear passenger door, Ruby's door.
And so Ruby and Hart were killed basically on contact.
They, the paramedics came and they tried valiantly to save them,
and they took them both to the hospital,
and then they actually flew Hart to another hospital.

They had a PICU unit, a pediatric intensive care unit.
And at that point, the doctor said he died of three life-ending injuries.
So he was going to die three times over.
But they never really breathed after the crash.
So to my mind, they died on impact.
How old were Hart and Ruby?
Hart was 14, and Ruby was 17.
One of the things that shocked me, I think, in reading your book,
beyond the story, is the terror that you describe in the hours and days following it.
You quote C.S. Lewis, and you say,
no one ever told me that grief felt so much like fear.
Can you explain what you and Gail went through in the hours and days immediately following it,
and the terror that you write about so powerfully in your book?
Yeah. It was a shock to me that that was the overwhelming feeling I had.
Even just stepping into our home, the void there was so overwhelming.
It was so scary to step into our house.
And I guess on some level, it made no sense to me,
because we just left the house eight hours, nine hours earlier in a state of real joy.
And now I was scared to come into the home without them.
I was scared to be in that space.
I was scared to sit at the dining room table without them.
That void was so powerful, and I guess it was like maybe a fear of losing my mind
that I would just veer off into insanity and never come back,
because the thought of living without Ruby in the Heart was just too terrifying,
and too mind-bending.
We were scared to go to bed at night.
I did have some powerful nightmares, those first nights in particular.
I just had a nightmare last night, actually, about Ruby in Heart.
Is it the crash, or is it like so?
No, no. It's never been the crash.
As far as I know, I've never dreamt of the crash.
It's really about talking to Ruby or Heart and then realizing that they're dead.
Last night, the nightmare was that Heart was going to come out of a coma,
and then I was going to have to tell him that Ruby was dead,
and that was terrifying in a nightmare.
And then at some point in my dreams, I always remember,
oh, no, wait, you're dead too.
So I've had those dreams a lot, that one of them is alive,
and I have to tell them that they have to live without their sibling.
And then I remember in the dream that they're both dead.
So there was the fear of nightmares, and then there was just a fear.
Gail and I had a fear that if one of us left the room or the house, we would die too,
and we'd be all alone in the world. So we had this thing called proof of life.
So Gail had a chunk of glass embedded in her lip from the car crash,

and she had to go to a oral surgeon to have it removed.
And she would text me, I don't know, every hour.
I'm in traffic, I'm here, I'm coming home,
because if time went by, we'd be scared that the person was dead.
One of the things that I wanted to talk to you about in this conversation,
and one of the themes that runs through your remarkable book, Finding the Words,
is how really courageous you are, almost confrontational, both with other people
as you're moving through grief, but also with yourself,
in the things that you're asking yourself to do,
in ways that I think would really surprise most people.
So one of the things that I think is surprising is that
not long after your only two children in the world are killed as teenagers,
you start, as you write about in this book, writing a one-man show,
which is not a natural segue, I don't think for most people.
And then shortly thereafter, you start writing a book,
which I think for most people, hearing the story you just relayed would seem incomprehensible.
That book, which is called Finding the Words,
you begin by calling out the grief orthodoxy.
In other words, the things that our culture tells us about grief
that you think is false, that you think is wrong.
And the main thing is this idea that grief, as you put it, is too big and too unknowable.
And so people often say to those that are grieving, there are no words, right?
I've definitely said that to other people.
Maybe you've said it before this happened to you too,
and now I feel like an idiot having said it.
And your whole argument is that there are words.
So talk to me about coming to that realization.
I'm also curious, have you ever said that to someone in the past?
Yeah, I might have been even too scared to even say that to a person in the past.
So I think I want to first definitely preface it by saying,
I don't want to shame anybody.
I don't want to shame you for having ever said that.
And there's nothing wrong with that phrase per se,
if it then continues to, it leads to a conversation about grief.
But I think oftentimes that phrase ends the conversation
because you're saying literally there are no words.
So let's just not talk about it.
But I think the reason people want to say it is it's almost like saying,
I like bow before this tsunami.
Yeah, absolutely.
You know, like I don't know how to even be adequate at this moment.
Right, yeah, no, absolutely.
And I think the main problem with that is that from my perspective,
the griever needs to process this loss.

It's so monumental that they need it to be acknowledged and witnessed by their community and they need to just talk about it, just to understand it.

I think to my mind, it's not a search for adequate words.

It's just a search for words that we don't need to judge what we're saying in that sense.

What do you say to somebody who's just lost their two children?

The main thing is, can you be there for them to listen to them so they can start to talk about it?

Before this tragedy happened and before you started writing about grieving, had you thought about this as a subject before?

No, not at all.

I like to say that my family is like grief averse.

Right.

Like we don't talk about grief in my family.

So I had no tools.

I had no words.

That's why I said I probably didn't even say there are no words to somebody.

I probably just didn't say anything at all.

And I think part of it is our culture sends us messages that we're supposed to leave the griever alone, that we don't want to upset them.

We don't want to remind them of their loss.

To my mind, it's kind of an easy cop out because that's how it felt to me.

That's how I operated.

I was like, oh, this person died.

Well, they probably don't want to hear from me.

They have closer friends and I'll just leave them alone.

And I think the reality is that people in grief need community.

We get plenty of alone time.

And nobody's going to remind us of our loss because we haven't forgotten it.

There's no way someone's forgotten that their spouse died or their children died or their sibling died or their parent died.

Right.

We're not going to forget those things.

And a big mistake I think people make is the idea that we're supposed to offer comfort to these people.

We're supposed to take their pain away, but actually we can't take their pain away.

Nothing's going to fix loss, right?

The person's dead.

You can't fix that.

And that's not really what we need.

We need to experience the pain.

We need to feel the pain because it comes from love.

It's a beautiful pain.

So don't take away my pain.

You can't anyway.

And attempts to try and take away the pain, that's where you get into trouble.
If someone says things that like, oh, well, at least they had a good life.
That maybe sounds like a nice thing to say, except you're ultimately minimizing the pain.
You're saying, at least they had a good life, so stop crying, right?
Right.
You know, you're young enough to have another child, so stop crying.
But we need to cry.
We need to feel that loss.
And I think even if you believe in heaven and you believe that your loved one is in heaven,
you still lost them here on earth.
There's still a loss.
You need to feel that pain to my mind.
One of the false ideas about grief that you take aim at in this book is the idea that
because everyone grieves in their own way, as the saying goes,
that no one can possibly imagine what you're going through.
Talk to me about realizing that that wasn't true.
Yeah.
Well, it's sort of a two-step thing.
One was a lot of the books I read and grief groups I went to, they used that phrase,
everybody grieves in their own way.
And it was meant to be validating.
In other words, whatever you're doing is great.
Don't judge yourself for your grief.
But I was judging myself in my grief for sure.
But I didn't need that validation.
I needed some sort of help.
I needed some guidance because I had no idea how to grieve or what was happening
or what was going to help me in this moment.
And I feel like as I talk to more and more people in grieving,
it seemed like there was a lot of commonality.
There was a lot of things we needed.
One of the things we needed was community.
So in these grief groups, everybody talked about how many people abandoned them,
how isolated they felt, how they felt like people were just backing away from them
and they were on their own.
And I was like, okay, so it seems like we all need community.
Nobody's thrilled to be alone in their grief.
So maybe the idea of leading people alone is not a great idea.
And the other thing that seemed clear to me was we all needed to talk about our grief.
We needed to share our pain and we needed to talk about our loved ones.
Everybody I talked to was desperate to talk about the people that had died.
And so it seemed to me that that was really kind of the key to grieving
is being engaged in your pain and talking about your loved one to other people.
And so the idea that everyone grieves in their own way,

in my mind, I inverted it and I said, we all grieve the same
and we all avoid grief in our own way.
Because we all avoid grief.
You don't want to sit in grief non-stop.
That would be terrible.
It would be a bearable.
Unbearable, right.
We need breaks.
We need to be able to just have an ice cream cone or look at the sunset for a moment.
Of course, I look at the sunset and I think about Ruben Hart,
but there are moments we need to take breaks and avoid the grief.
Another of the sort of false ideas about grief that you puncture in this book,
and this is kind of, to my mind, the beating heart of it,
is this idea of silence around it or the notion that this pain is so unspeakable
that it cannot be spoken about.
It has to be experienced privately.
It has to be avoided or ignored.
Where does this come from?
Is it simply that as animals, we want to avoid pain?
Where did we get this idea that talking about grief is so unspeakable?
Yeah, I think it is.
I think it's people who are uncomfortable with discomfort.
And the friends that showed up for me were the ones that were willing to sit with me
in my pain.
And I talked about in the book that the first lesson I got was the night that
Ruben Hart was killed and this ER doctor at the PICU unit,
everyone was avoiding us at the hospital.
There were social workers.
I knew there were social workers.
I knew their job was to come and talk to us about loss and grief.
And they were avoiding us.
And it's like, that's weird.
They're scared of us.
People were scared.
And this doctor came in, told us the brutal news that not only was Ruby dead,
but now Hart was about to die because we're going to pull the plug on him.
And then she said, tell me about Ruby and Hart.
And so she sat with us in this most extreme moment.
And she was not scared of the pain.
And we wept and talked about Ruby and Hart.
And it was so powerful to see somebody not scared of us after seeing these other doctors
and ER personnel being scared of us.
Do you think the fear comes from people thinking, I don't know what to say?
Or the fear comes from, what is at the heart of the fear actually?

Is it the inadequacy or is it something else?

I think it's a couple of things.

I think that people are scared that if they said, say Ruby and Hart,

say their name to me, I might start weeping.

And they might not know what to do.

Yeah.

And they'd be very uncomfortable because I would be out of control.

I'd be weeping out of control.

And nobody wants to be out of control.

And it's scary.

And so in the early days, Gail and I would keen, like weeping into keening.

Like it's very unsettling.

It's very disturbing and scary.

Would that happen ever in public?

No, but some people witnessed us doing it.

I think I'm too uncomfortable to weep in public.

Yeah, I think, I wish I weren't.

I wish I wept in public more.

I was crying at the airport just like two weeks ago.

I was just sitting on a bench and crying in the airport.

Alone?

Alone.

Did anyone come up to you?

No.

Really?

No.

And that felt interesting to me because usually I just, I hold it in later.

Like for example, on another plane ride just a few days earlier, a week earlier,

I wept in the bathroom on the plane.

So it was private.

But it's hard not to feel self-conscious maybe for me, but I think it's healthy

because we should be normalizing it, I feel to me.

At some point in your grieving process, you arrive at what you call a radical approach to grief.

And that is definitely the approach that comes through in this book.

Tell me about what a radical approach to grief looks like.

Well, in that context, I think it was really about leaning into the pain

that once I decided that I didn't want to run away from the pain,

the next logical step I guess was, okay, then go towards it.

Ruby wrote a very beautiful essay.

She struggled with OCD and depression.

And she wrote this beautiful essay about OCD, which I included in my book,

where she is on the beach and she's seeing these waves coming in.

And for her, it was the waves of depression and of OCD, of obsession,

of obsessive and compulsive behaviors.

And in the essay, she's terrified of being tumbled by the waves.
But she knows that after each wave, it recedes and you can come up for air.
And she ends the essay with her running towards the water.
Big waves are coming and she's going to run towards the water.
And I love that idea.
And so I sort of try to practice that.
I run towards the pain, not exclusively.
I'm not a masochist and I'm not trying to feel pain.
I'm trying to run towards the pain so I can let go of the pain,
so I can suffer less ultimately.
That's sort of what I found true for myself,
that the more I allow myself to feel the pain and not,
and go to Rubin Hart's favorite restaurants, right?
Go to Rubin Hart's favorite hikes, allow myself to look at their pictures.
It allows me to be more in this world.
In the present world and not locked away in the past.
One of the things that jumped out to me in reading your book is
how unbelievably forthright you and Gail were in asking whether it was your workplace
or your friends or your family, asking for what you want.
And that's a quality that I think most of us find very out of reach on a normal day.
And first of all, I wondered if you guys are just very upfront in general as people,
or was this something that you learned in the wake of Rubin Hart being killed?
Yeah. Well, it's a combo.
So because we're, I guess, generally theatrical people from theater background,
so we're comfortable in that sense, but definitely uncomfortable asking for what I need.
Definitely. I'm not in the past comfortable asking for what I need.
No, definitely not. It came out of necessity.
So after Shiva ended, I needed to talk to people about Rubin Hart and my grief.
I just, I became addicted. It's like, oh my God, I need this. This is so helpful.
And so I had to discover a way to keep asking for it.
Other people were going to disappear. I could feel them.
I could feel them all sort of drifting away and not wanting to talk to me.
And I was like, oh, no, I need this.
So it was really, I think, out of desperation.
In the book, you share, and I think very helpfully, a bunch of
notes that you sent to people over the years and in different contexts.
And there was this email that jumped out at me where you are offering criticism to a friend
who is trying to be helpful to you, but in fact is driving you away.
And I wondered if you would, if you would read that.
Yeah, yeah, for sure.
We were very careful taking care of ourselves, I think Gail and I.
And so part of the idea is, if something is causing us pain that's unrelated to grief,
like called suffering, right? The things we don't need.
We tried desperately to avoid those things.

We want to make our lives as easy as possible as we're leaning into the pain of grief.
And so we had this friend who loved us, loved Ruby in Heart and is a beautiful person,
but also a very poetic person.
She has a gift with words and she had a habit of sort of talking to us,
telling us about our grief rather than asking us.
And it was a generous offering on her part, right?
She was trying to connect with us, trying to maybe validate our feelings,
but she was sort of getting ahead of us.
She was telling us what we were feeling in a very beautiful way.
And we, it drove us crazy.
And so we had like these debates like, what do we say to her?
It's so weird.
How do we bring this up?
It's so specific.
You know, it's not like an obvious thing.
It's like a very specific note.
Yeah, yeah.
What's the note?
What do we tell this person?
Because sometimes it's easy to tell somebody, don't say this to me, please.
You know, I can't hear about your grief over your dead cat right now.
I just can't.
Okay, we can do that.
It's pretty cut and dry.
But this was weird.
So here's what we did.
We sent her an email, subject, a little heads up and we love you.
Because we always try and try and leave with love, right?
Let me give people notes.
Hey, we're psyched to see you today,
but there's something we've been wanting to bring up
that we think might be easier in an email.
We know that you only want to love and support us,
and we feel loved and supported.
But we've also noticed that you have a tendency to tell us
how we feel or to describe our situation in vivid and poetic terms
that are hard for us to hear.
For example, instead of telling us that being at our friend Shiva,
quote, must be devastating, please just ask us how we feel.
Or for example, saying, quote,
it's like someone pushed stop on Rubian Hart's lives, unquote.
While true in many ways, just underscores and adds to our sorrow.
This email isn't to say that we don't want to talk about this with you.
In fact, we think it would be better if we do.

It's just that we don't want to blindside you.
See you soon.
We love you.
Gail and Colin.
How did she respond?
And how did you have, frankly, the patience to send that?
Rather than just doing what I imagine might have been your impulse,
which is like, we're just going to avoid this person.
Right, right.
That's exactly what our impulse was.
Yeah.
And we talked about it.
Maybe we just avoid them forever.
And then we were like, well, wait a minute.
This is a beautiful friend and she's trying to help us.
And I think that's really what we grieverers are confronted with all the time,
because everybody, I think, in our lives is going to, quote,
unquote, fail us in some way or other, because they just don't know.
Our culture doesn't help us in this regards.
And so I think it behooves us to have the grace
to figure out a way to reach these people who are
saying things that we find difficult to hear and at least trying,
trying to give them the note.
Maybe some people can't take the note.
Maybe some people can't be there for us in our grief.
But I think it's worth trying.
How did she respond?
Beautifully, beautifully.
She wrote back, and I always tear up when I read this email from her.
Thanks, Gail and Colin.
I really appreciate you telling me that.
I'll do my best to not narrate your experiences.
I've never walked with a friend through something like this,
and I'm sure to fall flat on my face several times.
But I really appreciate knowing when and why that is so,
so I can be a better support for you.
It means a lot to me that you told me and I'll take it to heart.
X, X, X, X.
And she later told us on the walk, I walked with her and she said,
she saw right away what it took for us to write this email,
and then it meant that we valued her friendship enough
to make this risk, to make this effort.
And what she says is so beautiful,
the idea that I've never walked with a friend through something like this.

It's like, yeah, no kidding.
Who has to walk through a friend who's lost two children?
And it's quite remarkable that she wrote right back so beautifully,
and then we had a walk together and we talked about it.
And I love that she allowed me to include this email in my book.
Yeah, and so we're friends to this day,
and she's never narrated our lives again,
and she's been beautiful support for us through our grief.
And it would have been so terrible if we had given up on her.
One of the emotions, in addition to the tears that comes up in this book, is rage.
And you and your wife developed this practice that's called hate-dajour
as a way of, as you write, sublimating our rage.
Tell me about the rage and about hate-dajour and how you dealt with the anger.
Yeah, you know, I would think that all my anger would be centered on the woman who killed my
kids,
but that's not how it works, I don't think for anybody.
I just think there's just rage, just erupts, because we've been robbed.
I've been robbed of Ruben and Hart by the universe, by this woman, yes,
but also just the universe.
I thought I was going to get a full life with them.
You know, I just believed that.
The thought that both of them might be killed never entered my mind in my whole life.
The idea that they would both be killed, that just wasn't a possibility.
So there's this rage that comes up and it can erupt just randomly.
It can be just like triggered by the smallest of slights.
And what do you do with all that?
And so I found that Gail and I, we needed to develop some kind of outlet that was healthy
and wasn't harmful.
We weren't like striking out against the people around us who were there to support us.
So we developed this thing we call the hate-dajour.
It was actually her sister Betsy coined the phrase hate-dajour.
And I love it.
I love it because it's like a playful element, right?
There's a little French.
It's like the food of the day, right?
And it's French.
It's just sort of silly.
Which is nice because it takes it to a less bitter place, maybe.
And so Gail and I, we'd be gale each other with stories of what this person had done to us
and what our response might be in our minds.
You know, what we might say to destroy them in the moment.
And my wife is a very good writer and a very funny writer.
So her hatred is George.
We're quite entertaining.

And I tried to hold my own.
But we'd never say it to the person in their presence.
It was like Gail called her, she wrote them down, many of them.
She called it her burn book of grief.
And hopefully no one will ever read her burn book of grief
where she just tears into people.
But it was just a way of exercising our rage.
How much of the rage was about what I imagine it would be?
Like being at a bar mitzvah of another kid, being around a family
where the children were still there and the envy of that.
I think envy in those situations, but not rage.
We've been to a bar mitzvah, we've been around families.
And the rage comes, I think it makes some, sometimes when people,
it sounds weird, but like treat us as if we're not grieving.
So on one level, we don't want to be pitied.
Some of us are hate to George for people who are like, oh, gosh, you know.
Right.
Don't do that.
Don't give me little sad puppy eyes.
Right.
How dare you.
But then the other side of the coin is if people treat us like nothing's happened.
And we're just regular people.
And therefore we can be treated dismissively like you might treat anybody.
That's just like, do you know what I'm dealing with right now?
How dare you?
You know, just erupts.
Yeah.
After the break, Colin Campbell doesn't sound like a Jewish name,
but he explains how Judaism was critical in helping him through his morning.
More with Colin Campbell after the break.
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Who modeled this approach for you?

Because given the fact that our culture has very poor ideas, it seems to me about grief, about the need for individuality and isolation and not having a community or certainly not having rituals in our mostly secular society, where did you get the idea of your approach? Because I think to many people, it will sound very unnatural.

I think part of it was Ruby and her essay, and I got a lot of it from the Jewish traditions of grieving.

And one of the first lessons I got is when it came time to bury Ruby in heart.

And so in the Jewish tradition, the people closest, in this case Gail and I, we threw the first clumps of dirt onto the coffins with our bare hands.

So we were literally burying our children.

And then we sat on a seat and watched as our gathered community through shovelfuls of dirt onto the coffin.

And on one level, it seems like that's cruel.

Like give these parents a break, you know, just let's put them in the back and let's have them be there and then let's get them out of there fast.

I imagine, you know, if you're trying to be quote unquote gentle to us.

But the Jewish tradition is acknowledging that I think that denial is such a powerful and unhelpful place to be.

And so right away, we have to sit and watch our children get buried by our community.

And then when I step back and thought about it, that's beautiful.

It's beautiful because here my friends are weeping and burying our children.

It's like, what a beautiful act, you know?

That's community building.

That's bonding us in the grief and it's combating denial and it's walking towards the pain.

It's not backing away from the pain.

Hmm. You did not grow up Jewish.

Your name is Colin Campbell.

Tell me, broadly speaking, and then we can get into some of the rituals.

What you found so compelling about the Jewish approach to death.

So my wife's Jewish, we raised Ruby and Heart as Jews.

And when it came time to grieve them, we just agreed we're going to follow what the Jews say.

So whatever our rabbi tells us to do, we're going to do.

So what happens in the Jewish tradition is that every night for the first seven nights after the burial, your community comes to your house and sits with you.

And again, my first instinct is no, hell no.

Why are people coming to my house?

My kids were just murdered.

I need to be alone, right?

I thought.

And then these people all just arrive at the house.

I remember being so angry.

I'm like, these people are invading my home.

This is crazy.

And then our wise rabbi turned to us and said, do you want to talk?

Do you have anything you want to say to these people?

And then I suddenly realized I did.

I wanted to talk about Ruby and Heart and my grief.

And so did Gail.

We all told stories about Ruby and Heart.

And it was, we cried and laughed together as a community.

And we kept doing it night after night.

So it's like, yeah, it's like lean into the pain, let yourself feel the pain.

And another tradition that the Jews have is saying Kaddish.

So you have to say this, what's called the mourner's prayer.

And you have to say it every day for the first year after the death of a loved one.

And you can't say it alone.

You have to have at least nine other people with you.

So again, you're grieving in public.

So you're going to cry.

We cried every time we said mourner's Kaddish.

And the Jews basically forced us to cry in public with these people.

And it was so powerful that they came out for us.

They were there to support us.

They showed up early in the morning and stood around us and said the prayers with us.

So that's all leaning into the pain to my mind.

Let's take those in turn.

So the first seven days, which is Shiva,

which you mentioned that people come to the home every single evening.
And there's a prayer service and your rabbi wisely asked you to speak.
But there are other rituals involved in Shiva that you mentioned in the book.
Tearing of the garment, tell us about those.
Yeah. So there's some quote unquote rules around Shiva.
So you're not allowed to groom and you tear your shirt on the first night
and then you wear that torn and dirty clothing shirt all seven days.
You're not allowed to have sex.
You're not allowed to do work.
And I found that those quote unquote rules were helpful to me
because I didn't want to brush my hair.
I felt like that was disgusting to me.
Like how can I brush my hair?
My kids were just killed.
Grooming seemed like an affront.
And so I love that actually I was required not to.
It sort of helped me socially lean into just my dishevelment.
The other thing that happens in Shiva is I think people are coming to your home
and they imagine you're hosting, but that's not how it works, right?
Right. So several beautiful things happen.
One is the people come and they're the hosts.
So the people who arrive earliest set everything up.
They bring the food.
They bring extra chairs.
They take care of everything for you.
And then the group that hangs out towards the end, they clean up everything.
So you, the griever, don't do any hosting.
And you're not supposed to go to the door and greet the guests.
The doors left open.
The guests just come in the door and they're supposed to take their cues from the griever.
So technically they're not supposed to address the griever until the griever addresses them.
Which I think is another sort of beautiful detail.
So you don't have someone barging in, hey, Colin, how are you doing?
Right. They need to come in and they need to take in where I'm at.
Because in early grief, especially, I think we can ping pong dramatically.
We can be weeping one moment and we can be laughing the next.
And I did.
Gail and I, like I said, we come from a comedic tradition.
Our family, the four of us loved good jokes.
A lot of inappropriate jokes.
And we were, we were making jokes the first day.
Dark, dark, dark, dark jokes at times.
And other times we were not in the mood for any kind of joking.
And so what's beautiful is everyone's taking their cue from the griever.

You follow their lead emotionally.
And you talk about in the book walking.
I had never heard that.
Oh, yeah.
I've never been a part of that.
I thought it's so moving to hear you describe it.
It's so powerful.
The last night of Shiva, the tradition is that you walk around the block.
And we were in our homes that first week.
It was scary to leave our homes.
We had to because there were some doctor's appointments and things.
But in general, we didn't leave our homes.
And now the end of Shiva, we all get up and walk as a community around the block.
And we basically stopped traffic.
There was like 150 people walking down these small Silver Lake streets.
So that was it.
So a car came and then they had to just back up because there was all these people filling the streets in honor of Ruby and Hart.
And that felt powerful.
That felt like a little transgressive in a good way.
Like, yeah, Ruby and Hart died.
So we're going to break some traffic laws right now.
We're going to make an announcement to the world.
And also just literally reintroducing us to the world is the idea.
Tell us about Shloshim, which not all Jews do.
It's a pretty traditional thing.
What happened for you at that 30 day mark?
So what I found remarkable about Shloshim is that there aren't so many rules about that.
So basically some of the rules get removed from Shiva, but not all of them.
So you're not allowed to see live music is one rule, which I actually, I wish I'd listened to that rule.
I broke that rule and I watched a live play and it was quite painful because there was so much life, you know, seeing people up on stage, either performing music or dancing or acting.
I think the rule is there because it's too hard for us to see people so full of life as we're grieving.
I wish I'd waited longer to see that play.
But we're allowed to go back to work.
We're allowed to have sex.
And we're allowed to groom.
And for the end of Shloshim, you're supposed to mark it.
You're supposed to hold a ceremony of some sort to mark the end of the first 30 days.
And what was so interesting was that there are no specific instructions about how you do it.
And that meant that Gail and I had to invent our own ritual.

We had to decide, well, what would be meaningful for us?
What would we want to do?
Where would we want to gather?
It's going to suddenly be a holy place.
It's not in our home.
I think it's designed to not be in your home.
So we had to do it somewhere else.
And we knew that place would be, like I said, kind of holy to us in our community.
And we chose the Los Angeles Arboretum.
It's a beautiful park that meant a lot to Ruben Hart and Gail and I.
We've been there many, many times throughout their entire lives as babies up to teenagers.
And we loved it.
And we dedicated two trees to Ruben Hart.
We found these amazing Angolan Oaks.
They look like they're hugging each other.
It's quite extraordinary.
And it seemed like a kind of wild place in the park.
And it's also a trek.
So it meant that all of our friends had to essentially do a pilgrimage to get there.
It was going to be out of their way.
It's not convenient.
And they all showed up and we decided what the ceremony was.
So we said, we're going to have a friend of ours is going to sing a song.
We're going to tell stories about Ruben Hart.
We're going to talk a little bit about the crash.
And the rabbi is going to say some prayers.
And then the rabbi added some beautiful details where we all put our hands on each other.
And then people put their hands on the trees and we just sat and listened.
And we all wept and we all laughed again.
And so it was beautiful.
It was also painful.
It was hard.
It took a lot out of us.
But in the end, it felt worth it.
And it also gave us some direction.
Those those 21 days after Shiva before marking the end of Shoshim were like,
what are we doing with ourselves?
And here we had a purpose.
Well, we've got to organize this ritual.
We've got to plan it.
We've got to dedicate the trees.
We've got to organize all this stuff.
And that helped us.
I think for the listener hearing you describe these highly traditional Jewish rituals,

they probably assume that you are a believer, that you believe in God.
But well, why don't you tell me where you fall on that question?
Yes. So I'm an atheist.
I don't believe in God.
I believe in love.
It seems kind of spiritual, the sticker.
Sounds very California.
Very California.
It does.
I swear I'm not California like that.
But I guess maybe I am.
No, but I do believe that we are all connected,
that we aren't individuals in the end,
because I realize how much of me is Ruby in heart.
So they're gone, but they created me in a sense.
They shaped me.
They're still in me.
They influenced me.
So so where do I end and where do they begin?
Or vice versa.
And so I suddenly think that's true for all of us.
We are also part of our communities of love.
While Judaism seems overwhelmingly to be this great source of comfort to you and Gail,
you also talk about the points where Judaism or faith, let's say,
sort of conflicts with your grief.
You call in the book, The Concept of the Afterlife,
a quick fix and a form of denial.
You also talk, I think, very powerfully about how unhelpful the phrase is,
everything happens for a reason, or God has a plan for everyone,
which is like, how would God have a plan for your two children to be killed?
The most emblematic moment, I think, of your expression of that in the book,
is when your wife, at the time she's a TV writer for the show Black-ish,
she goes back after three months to the show.
And before she does, she sends a note to the whole cast and crew.
And in it, she writes about how she was finding tremendous comfort in her Judaism,
but then she writes this, and I want to read it, quote,
If your worldview includes the belief that my tragedy is part of God's plan,
or that my children are in a better place, please don't share that with me.
It'll only upset me.
I believe their deaths were senseless and random,
and there's no better place for them than here on earth with me.
I hope you understand.
How often did you have to express that kind of thing to people?
How much were you encountering the kind of

problem of everything happens for a reason?

And did that ever set you off into incandescent rage?

That's a great question.

So Gail specifically knew that there were members of the crew on Black-ish that did feel that, that they were in a better place, and that God has a plan.

Well, that's a very traditional Christian conception.

Yes, and so she was, again, protecting herself, which was very wise.

So she didn't hear that.

They got it right away and didn't share those thoughts.

And I sort of alluded to this to earlier, but I have no problem with people who do believe in that, and people who are grieving who believe that.

I think that's wonderful if you can have anything to help us in our grief.

So if you have a belief system that the person you lost is in heaven, and you'll be reunited later, great.

That's wonderful, but it's not a quick fix to the grief we have on earth.

That's what I think, that we all need to be allowed to grieve, because we all lost.

Even if you believe in heaven, we still lost someone here on earth.

And so flip side of love is the grief, and I want to encourage people to allow themselves to feel that loss and not think like something's wrong with them, because why aren't they celebrating? Their loved one's dead, and now with heaven, so hooray, you should be happy, you know, that kind of thing.

You can take comfort from it, but there's still going to be pain.

Colin, how did your rabbi explain the role of God in this?

If traditional Judaism, let's say, believes in an all-powerful God, how could an all-powerful God allow this?

I didn't have to worry about that, because I don't believe in an all-powerful God.

And does Gail?

She does. Well, I don't know about all-powerful, but she believes in God.

But I do know one of the rabbis at our synagogue was really rocked by Ruben Hart's deaths in relation to God. Why did God allow this to happen?

You know, because that's part of her belief system.

So I told our rabbi at the funeral, I said, look, my whole family's atheist, so please don't mention God at the funeral. That's my one request. And so she didn't.

One of the maybe most radical parts of your book is the way that you talk about the relationship between love and pain. You write this, you say, we teach children about love, but not about the loss that necessarily accompanies it. And you advise someone who's grieving to allow yourself to feel that pain and consider it love. You hear the articulation of you feel pain, commensurate with the amount of love you felt. But the idea that pain is love was a kind of radical idea for me. Tell me about how this whole experience has changed your understanding of love itself. Well, I think that I'm not so scared of the loss, not so scared of the pain that's going to come with it. It sort of makes more sense to me. We're all going to lose people. We don't get to be on this earth and not feel grief, it seems to me. It's just, it's a universal part of our lives. And yet we don't talk about it. Like you said, we don't talk about it, and especially to children. I think people are,

are afraid that it's going to upset kids. And I think that the opposite is true. I think that kids can talk about grief, they can understand grief, and not talking about grief confuses them. Not talking about death is confusing because they know people die. So if no one's talking about it, it makes it seem more taboo, more mysterious, more, I think, disturbing ultimately. One of the things that happened in the weeks and maybe the months after they died is that people would tell you that if this happened to them, they would kill themselves. Yeah. Did you think about killing yourself and what stopped you from doing that? I never thought about actually killing myself. I never had any plan. There were times when I didn't want to be alive. Yeah. There were times when I didn't want to be alive and in this much pain and missing and aching, the aching for Ruby and Hart. But never progressed to any place where I was actually making plans. And part of it was that Ruby struggled with suicidality, and she really overcame her suicidality as much as one can. And she wrote a comic about it. It was so beautiful in which she ends by saying, if you're feeling suicidal thoughts, please get help. I'm in a different place now than I wrote this comic. And so she was really an advocate for mental health and a warrior against suicidality. So the idea that I would kill myself would be horrible, a front to Ruby. I couldn't do that to her, her memory. I couldn't do that to Gail or my family. The other thing is I was like, Ruby and Hart died and our whole community is in pain and rocked with pain. I'm not going to add to that by killing myself and just cause more pain to all these other people who are already experiencing pain. So I never were the struggle with that. One thing that you and Gail do is you have these giant pictures that are blown up of your children. And how long were they in your house for it? For a year, for the first year after the crash, we had these giant two by three photos of Ruby and Hart, eight of them total, taped up to the wall of our living room. So it was like a giant shrine to them. And then at about the year mark, we started exploring the idea of fostering to adopt. And I was like, we can't have giant photographs of Ruby and Hart in our living room and then bring a child in here and be like, hey, we're ready to be your parents. You're a ghost house. Yeah, exactly. So I took them down. The reason that detail stuck out to me and I want to get to the fostering in a bit is because I tear up when I see a picture of someone that I've lost, even someone that died in their time, not in this unnatural way. To me, it's this through line in the book of how willing you are to rush toward the wave. When you were living in your house and looking at these pictures, I guess I'm really wanting to understand your interior experience of it. Is it that every time you're seeing the picture, you feel the urine and the pain and the ache every time? How much of that feels like ache and how much of that feels like love or are those the same thing? Yeah, well, ache and then joy. So the love is always there. But I had this idea early on, and maybe it was some exposure therapy because Ruby had OCD and some of the best ways of handling OCD is through exposure therapy, where you expose the person to their fears and you see like, oh, it's not so bad. And you basically, because mostly it's fear of the fear, right? You're scared of how scary it's going to be. And so I sort of, I guess, applied that to grief. And I had this idea that there was like a formula, an abstract formula. The more I look at their photos,

the balance between the pain and aching and the joyful memories and the sweet memories and the happiness will slowly shift and it will become more joyful and less aching. I think that's true. I think it's true, especially the photos that we have up regularly around the house that I've seen many, many times, I've seen every day. They're easier to look at. I can think more about the joy than the pain. But a friend of mine just sent me photos from Ruby's first and second birthdays. And you just pop up in my email and then it's like, okay, let's look at these photos. And you look at them and it's a lot more aching than joy, you know, because I haven't seen those photos. And it's like, wow, but also beautiful. I could see photos I hadn't seen of Ruby. Will you ever have a moment of, I'm going to choose not to look right now because I can't take it? Like for those photos, I didn't open it right away. I got the email and I was like, oh, he's sending me these photos. That's so nice of him. Okay, I'll take a breath. And maybe I'll look at the email like in a couple hours. And I did. I waited a couple hours and I looked at them and then we're back. It's just like taking a breath, I guess. It's like, here we go. Here's some pain, some joy and some pain. Here we go. But what happened was in regards to the photos in general, I put the big blown up photos up and then very early on, one of the mornings I came downstairs, I write about this in my book and I did look away from them. It was too scary. I was like, oh God, I can't look at their photos right now. I'm not ready. I can't do it. In that moment, I had this epiphany of like, oh my God, I'm turning away from my own children because I'm scared of the pain and I won't do that. I won't be so scared of the pain that I'm going to not look at my own children. No, I won't do that. And I was crying and I looked up at the pictures and I said, I'm not scared of you. And that was sort of this moment that really stuck with me because it guided me in the future. Like, yeah, I'm never going to not look at Rubian Hart's pictures because I'm scared of the pain. I'm going to handle the pain. I'm going to take the pain. I'm going to feel the pain and it's going to be okay. I want you to talk a little bit, if you would, Colin, about how losing Rubian Hart changed your conception of yourself. You write about identifying primarily as Gail's husband, but as their dad, that was an absolute primary part of your identity. And all of a sudden, that was gone. How did you find your identity in the wake of that? Yeah. At first, I really did not want to be the father of two dead kids. That was not my identity. I was still Rubian Hart's dad. And so you go to these grief groups and all these people are saying, oh, I lost so-and-so. I lost so-and-so. I'm like, no, I'm not part of this group. I'm not. But then you're like, oh, no, I am actually. My kids are dead. And then I grabbed hold of that as part of my identity. It was like I'm the father of two kids who were killed by a drunk driver. And that was my central identity. And then that also starts to shift. And each shift is painful. It's hard. It's hard to embrace that identity. And then it's hard to let that centrality in my identity go. So now when I meet somebody new, I don't just immediately say my kids were murdered. But I do think, okay, when am I going to tell them my kids were murdered? When someone says, how many kids do you have or do you have kids? Is there like a moment? There's more like a, oh boy, it's not a moment because I'm living with that all the time. So I'm not going to gasp like, uh-oh, I'm going to be more like, uh-oh for them. It's like you're holding a little grenade. Yes. And I don't know if I want to explode it or not. But I also feel like there's an activist side of me of like, I want people to know the heartbreak of drunk driving in case

they're ever thinking about driving and drinking and drinking and driving. So I was in a cab just a week ago and the cab driver said, you know, do you have any children? And I was like, well, I'm not going to lie for his comfort, pretend that Ruben Hart weren't killed.

And so I told him, I have four kids, I have, you know, two kids who I'm fostering to adopt, and I have two kids who were killed by a drunk driver. And then we had a little moment.

We had a real moment instead of just like a bullshit moment.

How did he respond?

He, uh, he was quiet for a moment and then he engaged. We talked a little bit about it.

And then when he dropped me off, he shook my hand and it was clear like he was a father.

He had, he had three kids and, um, he'd encountered drunk drivers on the road.

And so he had his own relationship to drunk driving and, uh, anger towards it.

And we just connected, I think more deeply. In the end, I walked away thinking,

I maybe darkened his night for a moment, but also we had a real moment.

We got to be real with each other. And isn't that better?

Isn't that better than just being like superficial?

So that's sort of your identity shifting from being Ruby and her dad to

a parent with two dead children. You mentioned also foster children, which I want to get to.

Let's talk about your identity as a husband and as a spouse. I think that there's definitely this maybe misunderstanding, but certainly popular conception that when a couple lives through such a horrible tragedy, even let's say a couple with a child with special needs, that there's just a much higher rate of divorce and that that obstacle or that challenge or this tragedy in your case tears the couple apart.

How did this change your marriage? And was that true for you and Gail?

So we were, we were always close. It was a very strong marriage, I have to say.

It really seems that way.

Yeah. Yeah. We love each other and we, and we love the idea that we're married together and we have these kids together. And I think after the crash, we grew closer because here we experienced this tragedy together. And we're the only people on earth who loved and lost Ruby and heart as their own children. So we have this bond, right? So we're the only ones that can understand each other's pain truly. And I think the key is that we talk about it. I think all those couples that are falling apart after these tragedies is because they're not talking about it. They're quote unquote grieving differently. What that really means is one person is talking about the grief and one person is, is trying to avoid it. But I think if people are talking about it and sharing it, then you're, I think you're going to grow closer because you've endured this horror together. Unless of course there's blame, which, which can sneak in all sorts of ways. It's not often on a podcast episode that I can guarantee something, but I can guarantee that every single person listening to this has experienced grief or will in their life, because that is part of what it is to be alive. And you write that the central question that mourners face is what will we do and how will we live? So I want to talk a bit about how to live through. And I don't even know if you would say after it, because there is no after it, how to continue to live through it and really talk a little bit about the practical things you describe in your book. You say the point is not just to survive, but to actively choose life. So let's start there with just the 10,000 foot Colin Campbell framework of the great command in Judaism, which is choosing life. How do you think about choosing life in the wake of death?

And then I want to get into some of the practical things that you advise people to do. Well, I really was struck by the whole idea of what do we do? Like what do we actually do, as opposed to sort of sitting around feeling sad? What are we doing? And I found that engaging in life was helpful to me in general, putting myself out there and trying things. Because part of me didn't want to try anything. Part of me wants to just go into a corner and a ball and just sit there, it's lying in bed or retreat, retreat from life. And that was scary. That impulse, I found scary. I didn't like the impulse that I wanted to retreat from life. And so I just, I guess, chose the opposite. So I sort of said yes to everything. So anytime anyone proposed anything to me, I would just say yes to it, no matter what, even if it seemed like a terrible idea. And that is how Colin went bungee jumping two weeks after his children were killed. Right. Well, maybe not, maybe not death defying things. You know, I avoid death defying things because that seems scary. But anything else, anything else?

I mean, the first, like the place you begin is advice someone else gave you who is experiencing grief. And it's very basic. It's get out of bed every morning. And in a way, I was like, that's kind of feels radical because I think the conventional wisdom is like you do you.

If your self-care or whatever the woo-woo language is dictates that you want to crawl under the covers and binge Netflix for four days because your kids were just killed, do it, do whatever it needs. But you say no, you say get out of bed.

Yeah. So that's exactly right. I did encounter that in some of these books. The idea of you do you and like eat that carton of ice cream and just curl up in bed. And I was like, no, don't do that. And I'm totally gently pushing the reader into life. I'm not trying to scold anybody. But yeah, I think that right after the death of a loved one, we're going to feel that meaninglessness that John Doody and talks about, the idea that life suddenly is robbed of all meaning. And it's shocking and strange because before Ruby and Hart were killed, I did lots of things. I had lots of things and goals and I'd love lots of different people. And when Ruby and Hart were killed, I didn't care about anybody else. Nobody else. I had no goals in life suddenly. Nothing mattered to me. It was the opposite. And I think we had to make an effort to reconnect or to find new meaning, new purpose because like I said, I didn't like that place where I didn't care about anything. I didn't care about life. I felt disconnected. I talked to my wife a lot, Gail, about feeling untethered. I felt untethered to this world. It's like I could take it or leave it at that point. If something terrible happened, I was kind of fine with it. Gail even talked about it. We were on a plane and like, well, maybe the plane's going to go down. Maybe. Would that be bad? I don't think so. And that feeling of just being untethered, it's not a great place to be. I didn't like it, but I was there for sure. And so I thought, okay, it motivated me to get out of bed and try and engage.

You mentioned before that your policy was to say yes to everything. What did you find yourself doing in those weeks and months? Like, what were you saying yes to?

Yeah. Because like a crazy montage was going on in my head where I'm like, Colin is saying, not to bungee jumping, but I was like, he's saying yes to everything. Like, what, what is everything? And what did your days look like? So a friend called up and said, hey, do you want to go skeet shooting? And I'd never done skeet shooting before. And I think in the past, I would have been like, no, but now I was like, yes, I do, even though I didn't want to. The other tricky thing about saying yes to people is that in early grief, it's very hard to make decisions. And it's very hard to commit to something ahead of time because

you're like, I'm like, yeah, what if I feel like I just can't even like see somebody. So the impulse is to say no to everything, like, oh, let's see. And I think that causes a lot of problems because people think on the outside, I think, oh, that means we should leave them alone. And the reality is that in early, early grief, those people, those green people are probably going to say no to everything, but don't give up on them because it's going to change. That's the tricky part. So anyway, I would just say yes to everything. So skeet shooting, nothing special. Yeah, I also went out with the same friend and shot a pistol. I've never shot a pistol before my life. But taking walks, went to a new park I've never been to before. I went to a new tea house I've never been to. I went to grief yoga. I've never done grief yoga before. But your whole ethos is very like churchilly and it's very like action this day. And it's just the opposite of when I have touched grief, it is very much the feeling of wanting to lay flat on the floor. And somehow you're like propelling yourself in forward motion for someone listening to this who's like, I don't know what this guy's talking about. Like, I'm just in bed. How do you get the will to propel like it was really propulsive was the energy I was feeling for you. Yeah, yeah. I mean, maybe it was just I was scared being in bed, but also I guess I had this idea that I don't care about life. So I better start acting like I care about life because then I'll probably care about life. It was just sort of trust. So when you're doing improv as a theater person, there's this thing called faking with confidence so that the audience doesn't know that you don't know what's going on. You just pretend you know what's going on. And then eventually you figure out what's going on. And that was sort of what I was thinking. I'm going to fake it with confidence and meaning is going to come later or caring about meaning is going to come later. The biggest action you take by far, I think is not the skeet shooting or the going for the walks or going to the tea house, it's deciding to become foster parents. Yeah. How did you come to that decision? Was that something that you and Gail had ever talked about in your past life before Ruby and Heart were killed? And tell us a bit about how that's been going for you. Yeah. So it was Ruby's idea first. It was her first idea. And she pitched it to us when she was like 15, maybe 16. She said, we should foster adopt. And we're like, what? So how do you even know what foster adopt is? And she said, yeah, I was doing research because she would do that. And she was like, there are a lot of kids here in Los Angeles that need loving home. We have a loving home. We should bring someone into it. And so beautiful that this teenager wants to do that. It's awesome. So it was about a week after the crash and Gail and I were just reeling and empty. And I said to Gail, we could still be parents again. We could foster adopt. And she burst into tears. A week after. Yeah. It was a week after. And she said, I'm so glad you said that because I was thinking that, but I was scared that you wouldn't want to. And so we started that path and we started way too early. Way too early. So clearly. I remember my therapist when I told my therapist that we were thinking about it. His face dropped and he was like, oh God, how am I going to talk this guy out of this? But we clearly were like flailing in those early days and wanted some kind of life, something besides just the pain of loss. But we were in no shape to parent other people. We were to consume with grief. And so in fact, we took these classes to foster. And then the social worker that was in charge there of the adoption pulled us aside and said, so normally after anybody's experience, any kind of loss, like a job loss or a divorce, we require that they wait for a full year before they think about fostering. How long has it been since you lost Ruben Hart? And we were like three months. And we just felt like, oh my God, we're so, so wrong. Then we waited for the rest of the year.

And then when the year was up, we're like, we're back. It's been a year now. We're still ready. We're still down for it. And we began the process and we connected with this young girl who was 13 at the time. And she was in a place where they were about to terminate parental rights because the biological family was not able to raise her. And we thought we were connected with her and she lived with us for a year and a half. And we really thought that we were a family. And it was going to go great. And then tragically, she was like, I don't want to be in a family. I want to be left alone. I want to age out of the system. I don't want somebody parenting me. And it's tough, but apparently it's not that uncommon with teenagers who've lived most of their life or a giant chunk of their life in the foster system. Their association with family is pretty negative. And their comfort, what they're used to is being left alone, left alone in foster homes and ignored at home with their biological family. And so it was very uncomfortable for her to be bonding with us. She did not want to bond with us. It made her uneasy, I think, very vulnerable. And so she left us and she's allowed to. She has a lawyer, kids in the foster system have their own lawyers. And she's like, I want out. We still in contact with her. We still do occasional texting. And she ultimately apologized for her behavior because she acted out against us a lot to try and convince us that she wanted to leave. But she's a remarkable young woman, so fierce and interesting and intelligent. And I hope she ends up in a good place. But then after she left us, we were heartbroken. We had another loss now. We've got loss upon loss. We thought we were a family. And then we're like, well, we've learned so much. We've learned so much from this other experience. Now we know so much more about parenting kids who are coming out of foster care and who have trauma. And so let's try again. And so we're trying again. And now we have a 13-year-old boy and a 12-year-old girl. And they live with us for seven months. Are they biologically related? They're biological siblings. Yep. And they're wonderful. But also, you know, a lifetime of trauma. So it's not like easy. When do you choose to explode the grenade with them, like that we were talking about before? How do you tell them about Ruby and Heart? Oh, we told them that Ruby and Heart before we even met them. We wrote a letter. We do the same thing with the other girl. Because we need them to understand our situation. Like we're told they're quote-unquote red flags. It's just like a paragraph of like, yeah, here's what their issues are. Here's what their history is. And then we're like, well, they got to know what our history is because they can back out. You know, we can't back out, but they can back out. Ruby and Heart's pictures are still up all over the house as are pictures of them. So we have all the kids' pictures up on the walls. And they ask about Ruby and Heart now and again. They're curious. But the boy plays Heart's video games. And they both are in their same room. So the boy's in Heart's room and the girl's in Ruby's room. But they're changed. They're completely transformed. They're different rooms now, but they're still physically the same space. Is there something uncanny about it? Yeah. Well, uncanny and painful. Too much? Not too much, but right on the verge. Right on the edge, leaning into the pain. So, you know, I think part of us thought like maybe we'll feel a little less grief. We've got kids in the house, but actually we feel more. We think about Ruby and Heart all the time because we're parenting. And parenting teenagers. Parenting teenagers. A boy and a girl in our house. But it's also beautiful. Like, for example,

we had a pool party for the girl. She had like four friends over. And they were splashing in the pool. And I walked away at one point and started crying and looked up to the heavens, you know, I don't believe in heaven, but looked up to the sky and that's just like, I'm sorry, Ruby and Heart, you're not here. But we have kids laughing in a pool. And without that, it would just be Gail and I and memories of kids laughing in a pool. So it's hard, but it's also beautiful. And they're great kids. These new kids. After the break, more with Colin Campbell. Stay with us. Let's go back to where we began by talking about your biological children. You know, one of the things I loved in addition to Ruby's essay that you shared in the book was the list that you found of things she wanted to learn. I wondered if you wanted to read that as a way of sort of bringing people into her unusual mind. Ruby was brilliant. I had an extraordinary special mind, unique. And she was kind of a combo of like a badass warrior and then like a nerd. So she loved sewing and knitting and crocheting and but you also wanted to lockpick and fly planes and learn martial arts. And so she studied Muay Thai, which is a particularly brutal martial art. It's a lot of like shin strikes and she loved it. So I call her my fierce lesbian warrior for social justice. That was her vibe. She did a self portrait of herself, obviously, for this drawing class. She had like a live, she drew people and the assignment at the end, so they were all naked people. And she was 16 years old, taking this college course, which was kind of wild. But then the final for the class was a self portrait and supposed to be just be in pencil. And she's like, no, dad, I'm going to do it in paint. I was like, oh, God, please, no, Ruby, just do it in pencil. Get the assignment done and over with. And she's like, no, I'm doing it in paint. And she painted herself life size as like a Renaissance warrior. So she's got a giant sword. She's got these bagging pantaloons and a doublet. And yeah, she's just a badass warrior. Read this list that you include in the book because I think it really captures a certain kind of personality. Yeah. So she titled it, here's a list of things that would be awesome to know. Romanian, sword fighting, embroidery, ballroom dancing, Russian, Eskima, which is a martial art form, JavaScript, how to fly a plane, bagpipes, mechanics, animation, etiquette, how to drive a boat, how to pilot a helicopter, crochet, lockpicking, ice skating, Nordic runes, gymnastics, hockey, magic, exclamation mark, knot tying, scuba diving, archery, writing, avian bone structure, braids, lace making, stealth, names of all the countries, how to clean things, manga creation, basic medical care, history, Norwegian, Arabic, hang gliding, Muay Thai drawing. So she wanted to be a spy, basically. I love she wrote avian bone structure. Not like birds bone, but avian bone structure. What was she going to do with that? I had no idea, but yeah, that was Ruby. And tell me about Hart and also their relationship to each other. Yeah, yeah. So Hart was this beautiful clown. He was genuinely hilarious. It sounds like I'm exaggerating, but I'm not. He was hilarious. And he would create these imaginary characters and started very early on, Ruby would get him to do it. So she would dress him up in a ridiculous costume, introduce him, and he'd come out into the living room as like a four-year-old and start performing some ridiculous monologue. I remember one time, one of my favorite ones was she came out like Courtney Love. So he had on this eyeliner, streaked, wearing a dress, holding a baseball bat with a pink wig. And he was like screaming like he had lost his mind. Just crazy characters.

And all of his friends adored him. They all were vaguely in love with him. And he was like the center of every party. He was like a homebody. He always wanted to stay at home.

He just like, I always want to be home. But then if we go to a party and he would be the life of the party and everyone would be around him, circled around him and following him around, imitating him. And they were both super sweet. They were both such kind humans. And they loved each other. So he was her biggest fan. So everything she did, every drawing she did, he'd be like, Ruby, that is amazing. It's so beautiful, like a 14-year-old boy, giving props to a 17-year-old sister. And like I said, she was gay. And I heard him playing video games with these boys. And someone would use the F-word, a slur against gay people. He'd be like, hey, don't use that word. He would school his friends, which is just so beautiful. Yeah. And they were just so in sync. There's this crazy game I talk about in the book that my sister-in-law and her daughter, they play this game where you have to say a word and then they say the first word that popped into their mind. And if it's the same word, they get a point. And they loved this game. They were so good at it because I thought they were so in sync. A mother-daughter were so in sync. It's so amazing. And they're like, you want to play Ruby in Heart? And they thought they were going to just trounce Ruby in Heart, right? It's a new game. And Ruby in Heart destroyed them. It was insane. Almost every word was the same. And I was like, I was like, what's going on? How is they're thinking the exact same word? That's ridiculous. Like someone said, feather, they both say horse. And they're like, what? How can you do that? Then we asked Ruby and she said, oh, it's simple. I didn't say the first word that would pop into my head. I said the first word that I think Heart would think of. So she knew what he was thinking. This is so wild. She was right. Yeah, they were super in sync. Last question. The word courage is a word that came up a surprising amount for a book that's about loss and grief. And I wondered if we could end by you talking a bit about the connection between grief and courage, because it was a connection I hadn't really thought about and I thought it was profound. Well, I think in grief, we're always given a choice. We can either engage with the grief or we can avoid it any given moment. And I think it does take courage to engage in grief. I know some grieverers who are like, don't call me courageous. I have no choice. Of course, I'm alive. Of course, I'm living. But I think we do have choices in how we live in grief. And if we're bottling up the grief or compartmentalizing it or trying to erase it as a way of protecting ourselves, I think it's going to backfire, first of all, and you're going to feel more suffering. But I think also I want to honor people who are going to just engage with their grief, who are going to let themselves feel the pain and still live with it. I think it does take courage and I think it's beautiful and healthy. Colin Campbell, thank you so much for coming out honestly. Thank you so much for having me. It's been such a great review. Really a pleasure.

Thanks again to Colin for coming on the show today and thanks as always to all of you for listening. If this conversation touched you, if it resonated with you, and most importantly, if you think it would be helpful to someone you know, please share it widely. Last but not least, if you want to support honestly, there's just one way to do it. Go to thefp.com and become a subscriber today. See you next time.