

What Others Are Saying About *Opening to Grief*

by Claire B. Willis and Marnie Crawford Samuelson

Grief can hit us as quickly as a bolt of lightning or silently creep up on us before we even know we're in its grip. *Opening to Grief* is a comforting and elegant collection of healing wisdom that offers differing paths to healing, through poetry, prose, mindfulness practices, art, and professional counseling experience. The perfect book for our times!

—Sharon Salzberg, author of *Lovingkindness* and *Real Happiness*

Opening to Grief is a beacon of light to guide you through the dark storm of loss. Filled with practical wisdom and inspiring poems and images, this treasured resource offers a hopeful invitation for deep healing and inner peace.

—Susan Bauer-Wu, PhD, RN, President, Mind & Life Institute, Author, *Leaves Falling Gently*

This simple and powerful book is an invitation to let the light of awareness touch, love, and heal our deepest and most impossible sorrows. In this warm and supportive guide book the authors lead us through practices that tend to our broken hearts and illuminate the unseen places we keep grief locked away.

—Will Kabat-Zinn, mindfulness and meditation teacher, member of Spirit Rock Meditation Center Teacher's Council

Opening to Grief is a compassionate, tender, and lovingly crafted "how to" guide for those who have suffered any kind of loss and are struggling to make their peace with it so that they can find their way back.

Though a slender volume and an "easy read," it is chock-full of sage advice, thoughtful suggestions, practical exercises, guided imagery, mindfulness meditations, healing prayers, inspirational poetry, and comforting words of wisdom that are at once both simple and profound.

The message throughout is that genuine grieving requires of us that we be fully present with the anguish of our grief; that we be "open" to the pain of our heartbreak; that we be fully present, engaged, and in the moment; that we enter into, and even embrace, our sadness; that we not run from it; that we not absent ourselves, dissociate, or refuse to feel the depths of our despair.

Open to any of the pages in this "companion guide," relax into its uplifting flow, and you will know that you are not alone on your journey back.

—**Martha Stark, MD**, Faculty, Harvard Medical School, Award-winning author of seven books including, *Relentless Hope: The Refusal*

A wise and sensitive book, this guide to working with grief is a treasure.

—**Roshi Joan Halifax**, Abbott, Upaya Zen Center, Author of *Living at the Edge* and *Being with Dying*

Willis and Crawford Samuelson have written a book about grief that is really a book about the practice of solace. They are gentle, kind guides to the turbulence and chaos of grief. No cookie-cutter prescriptions here, this is a wise book that will be helpful to the recently bereaved as well as those who have suffered losses long ago.

—**Kaethe Weingarten**, PhD, Associate Clinical Professor of Psychology at Harvard Medical School, 1981-2017 and author of *Common Shock*

Opening to Grief is a wise and gentle companion, a refuge as we move through the pain of loss. We learn to honor and cherish what has passed and to embrace our living moments ever more deeply.

—**Tara Brach**, author of *Radical Acceptance* and *Radical Compassion*

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Reading *Opening to Grief* is like sitting with a wise friend who has walked the difficult road of sorrow ahead of you. Full of gentle and nourishing practices, this kind book offers a supportive

hand when the ground beneath you has been shaken by loss. Listen to these two experienced travelers in the land of grief and you will find your way through the darkest of nights. A beautiful gift to all.

—Francis Weller, author of *The Wild Edge of Sorrow: Rituals of Renewal and the Sacred Work of Grief*

Thoughtful and deeply compassionate, *Opening to Grief* is a treasure—a book destined to support and inspire anyone living with grief, whether recent or from the past. The authors, skillful and experienced guides in lighting the way through grief, have assembled a sensitive, caring approach to one of life's greatest challenges.

Written as a companion or guide for handling grief, the poems, meditation guidelines, and many creative suggestions contribute to making this a reassuring, beautiful, and heartwarming book. *Opening to Grief* is an invaluable contribution to the field.

—Olivia Ames Hoblitzelle, author, *Aging with Wisdom and Ten Thousand Joys & Ten Thousand Sorrows: A Couple's Journey Through Alzheimer's*

In a world of increasing isolation and deep sorrow, *Opening to Grief* offers the medicine needed: a companion of voices, deep reflection, and masterful guidance.

—Sensei Koshin Paley Ellison, Guiding Teacher of the New York Zen Center for Contemplative Care and editor of *Awake at the Bedside*

Opening to Grief invites readers to approach and be with their grief, rather than turn away and try to avoid it. The authors mix reflections with simple yet profound practices anchored in mindfulness. It's easy-to-read and a wonderful addition to the grief literature.

—Sue Morris, PsyD., Director of Bereavement Services, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Boston, MA

Any time we make a change, there's grief on some level. Leaving a job, a relationship—even a toxic one—can be painful. Losing a beloved companion can be insufferable. With the support of a spiritual friend or the guidance of a book like *Opening to Grief*, we can learn to be mindful in the midst of it all. And eventually, when we stand up after all we've been through, we can see the beauty of it all.

—Spring Washam, author of *A Fierce Heart: Finding Strength, Courage, and Wisdom in Any Moment*

Excellent and simple and as clear as a needed glass of water in the desert. I cannot think of a better companion for our time.

—Katy Butler, *NY Times* bestselling author of *The Art of Dying Well*"

Opening to Grief is a simple and profound book for all who grieve. Willis and Crawford Samuelson are sure-footed, trustworthy guides on this complicated journey, and they lead with loving kindness.

This small book brims over with compassion, mindfulness, gentle guidance, permission and well-chosen poetry to enhance the lessons of each chapter. A helpful appendix lists the often-asked questions about grief with respectful and accessible answers. I will have more than one lending copy on my office bookshelves.

—Kathleen Adams, LPC, psychotherapist and founder/director, The Center for Journal Therapy

Opening to Grief is a welcome companion, as I grieve the loss of my home of 24 years and the community I have shared for 30 years teaching at Andover Newton Theological School. It speaks to me of the integrity and rightness of grief and of the life-giving possibilities and promise that comes in its wake. It also reminds me of all the ways I can open to my new life as it is unfolding.

Opening to Grief is a little treasure that invites people to read a chapter at a time, little by little, allowing the blank pages to remind us to give space to whatever we may be experiencing and to pause a minute before passing to the next chapter, as tempting as it may be.

Beautifully written, *Opening to Grief* is a jewel waiting to be discovered.

—Brita Gil-Austern, Philip Guiles Professor of Psychology and Pastoral Theology, emerita, Andover Newton Theological School

Opening to Grief is a beautiful new offering extended to bereaved people everywhere. This book is a guide, support and handbook for anyone grieving any loss. The authors create in the pages a space of support, connection, compassion and validation for people experiencing the pain of loss. It is a small treasure of inspiration with brief chapters that are easily digestible in short sittings. A reader can pick up the book and turn to any page to find a helpful suggestion for right now, a poem or inspirational quote to provide solace and connection, a prompt for writing or artmaking, an affirmation of lovingkindness or a suggestion to support beginners as well as adepts at the practice of meditation.

Opening to Grief affirms that expression and self-compassion in grief are soothing to the soul and that allowing our feelings to simply be is the most helpful way to move through and integrate them, no matter how painful. In this lovely book, Claire Willis and Marnie Crawford Samuelson invite the bereaved to meet grief with compassion and intention and lovingly show the way.

—Karla Helbert, LPC, E-RYT, C-IAYT, author of *Finding Your Own Way to Grieve: A Creative Activity Workbook for Kids and Teens on the Autism Spectrum and Yoga for Grief and Loss: Poses, Meditations, Devotion, Self-Reflection, Selfless Acts, Ritual*

Never have I seen this much useful information about grief presented in such a clear and inviting way, in so few pages. *Opening to Grief* is carefully and exquisitely structured to include grief education, easy to understand meditation techniques, simple actions, inspiring poems and quotes, and blank pages for personal writings. Generously filled with resources, it's a practical book of wisdom that I will recommend above all others.

—Connie Baxter, Bereavement Program Coordinator, Brattleboro , VT Area Hospice

Opening to Grief is a comforting and insightful companion for anyone navigating life after loss. During a time in life when so many of us feel lost and disoriented, *Opening to Grief* offers validation, solace, and compassionate insight into the universal yet very personal experience of grief. Chapters on art and writing, as well as meditation practices, empower readers to do important grief-work, while simultaneously cultivating self compassion and coping skills that will last a lifetime.

—Heather Stang, MA, C-IAYT, author, *Mindfulness & Grief*, Thanatologist, Yoga Therapist

Opening to Grief is a gift to anyone who is bereaved. With beautiful language, comforting thoughts, useful suggestions, and accessible practices, Willis and Crawford Samuelson bring healing and community.

—Hester Hill Schnipper, LICSW, OSW-C, Manager Oncology Social Work, BIDMC, emeritus, author *After Breast Cancer: A Commonsense Guide to Life After Treatment*

In a relatively compact book, you've packed a lot of gems for practice, support, wisdom, companionship and even an honoring of the celebration of all the gifts that have come our way. I can see this book being a wonderful companion as we grieve, regardless of the reason or the circumstances, or where we are in the timeline.

—Deborah Ross, LPC, CJT, co-author of *Your Brain on Ink: A Workbook on Neuroplasticity and the Journal Ladder (It's Easy to W.R.I.T.E. Expressive Writing)*

Claire Willis and Marnie Crawford Samuelson offer a clear, concise, and tender companion book to those grieving the loss of a loved one. Having myself facilitated thousands of support groups, including ones centered on bereavement, I appreciate the emphasis on not trying to shoulder the burden entirely by oneself. The book quotes Mary Oliver: “Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.” The authors gently encourage the reader to accept and fully experience her or his grief, which ultimately will lead to new discoveries, greater compassion, and a deeper understanding and appreciation for life. Included are many helpful suggestions and guidance on turning to art, nature, meditation, and writing to aid in the process.

—Bob David, Manager, Cancer Support Programs, Boston Medical Center, MA

No matter the loss you’re experiencing, or where you are in the process, you’ll find *Opening to Grief* a welcoming, warm, and wise companion. *Opening to Grief* is compassionate and practical drawing you toward peace at your personal pace.

—Rachael A. Freed, Founder, Life-Legacies, author of *Your Legacy Matters*
