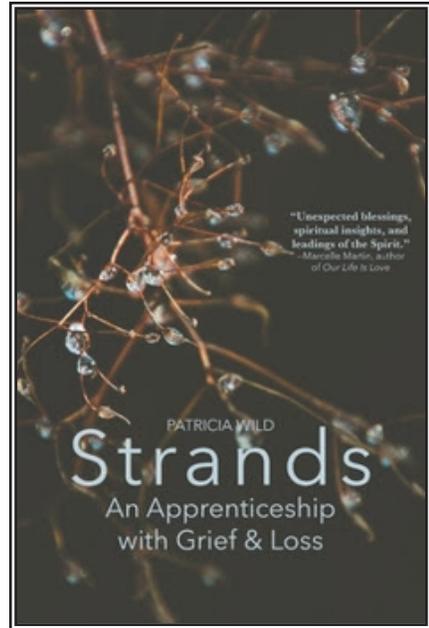


Strands: An Apprenticeship with Grief and Loss,
Barclay Press, 238 pages,
978-1594981678

Review by Doug Holder

PATRICIA WILD is a well known and respected writer, Quaker activist, journalist, and community organizer. She is an integral part of the beating heart of Somerville, and beyond. As long as I have known her, she has been a straight, no chaser sort of woman — with a built in shit detector. She is also a very spiritual woman, who questions herself and the world around her. In her new book, “Strands: An Apprenticeship with Grief and Loss,” she goes past the bone and into the marrow of grief, loss, and our very souls. I caught up recently with her for an interview.



You described your new book as an “opus of the soul.” Explain....

Sounds a little lofty, doesn't it! But I'm sure your readership knows this phenomenon — but perhaps uses different language. In the zone? Connecting with something greater than ourselves? Connecting with that gift we humans have been given: Consciousness? Our Muse showed up? There's something about connecting with Truth wrapped in all of this, too, right? And trusting, as a spiritual practice, that the words will come.

Much of your book is centered around Quaker practice. What led you to become a Quaker?

A long story. But a pivotal and conveniently-brief story may explain a teeny bit: On Easter Sunday an elderly Quaker stood: “we don't know what happened at Easter,” she said. “But we know this: There is Mystery.” I'd loved that!

The title refers to you as an apprentice of grief and loss. When does one move on from apprenticeship?

I wrote Strands during COVID. Subsequently, my beloved sister Deborah and my best-friend brother, Paul have died. So in a sense my immediate answer would be: Um, never? I did bring some gained understanding to these incredible losses in my life; some newly-acquired rituals helped. I freshly understood the importance of friends, community, sharing stories. But I also, humbled and overwhelmed by grief and loss, found a grief counselor.

One of the struggles you have had was around being a woman of privilege. Why couldn't you just accept that and move on?

I'm not wired that way, I guess. (And another reason why I joined a religious community in which folks at least try to walk the walk.) And to

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circle back to that marvelous thing called Consciousness, doesn't that huge gift ask our species to be aware of and to acknowledge Life's deeply-outrageous unfairnesses?

In this day and age, it is hard to find time for quiet reflection. But your Quaker practice involves this on a regular basis. What has changed in you from this reflection?

Um, everything? Early Friends called themselves Seekers of the Truth. My judgey-ness, my relationships, my confusions as to what I'm called to do in this overwhelmingly broken, broken world, how to answer someone's snarky email; in quiet reflection sometimes I can find my way. I'm gifted with a sense of Truth. And one of the things about seeking is, rarely, rarely are we given The Whole Picture. An early Friend, Caroline Fox (who apparently struggled with depression) basically said, "Live up to the Light and more will be given." In other words, inwardly ask/seek with curiosity and humility. And keep asking. ("How would my better angels response that snarky email?") It's the process that's important!

You quote Thomas Merton. Merton talks about mystical moments when he feels connected to all people — he is part of a larger organism. How often do you feel that way?

Such moments are preciously rare. And, unfortunately, we're not designed to be able to fully reconnect with such blissful and powerful moments as we did when we first experienced them. We remember them with incredible gratitude but they have faded. So unfair!

I am sure that you agree with Socrates, that the unexamined life is not worth living. Do you think there is a fear if we are in conversation with our soul...we might not like what we hear, and our complacency will be ruined?

What complacency? If we examine our lives fully.