

CANCER GRIEF: NAMING WHAT WAS LOST

A reflection for losses that do not always have a name

Cancer can take things without taking your life.

Energy. Confidence. Hair. Fertility. Sexual function. Work. Plans. Privacy. A sense of safety. Trust in your body. The version of the future you thought you were heading towards.

Some of these losses are temporary. Some improve slowly. Some remain changed.

And because you are still here, people may not recognise them as grief.

But loss is still loss.

GRIEF DOES NOT REQUIRE A FUNERAL

You can grieve a body that feels unfamiliar.

You can grieve the person you were before every ache had meaning.

You can grieve the ease of making plans without checking a treatment calendar.

You can grieve work you had to leave, friendships that changed, intimacy that became complicated or the ordinary confidence you once took for granted.

You can also feel thankful to be alive while grieving all of it.

Those feelings do not cancel each other out.

THE LOSSES PEOPLE OFTEN DO NOT SEE

Physical loss

Strength, stamina, mobility, hair, scars, weight changes, sexual changes or persistent treatment effects.

Identity loss

Feeling less like yourself, less independent, less confident or disconnected from the person you recognise in old photographs.

Future loss

Plans that changed, uncertainty about time, altered family plans or a future that no longer feels automatic.

Relationship loss

People who disappeared, relationships that changed under pressure, or the loss of being treated as an ordinary person rather than a patient.

Safety loss

The ability to assume that a symptom is “just a symptom.”

Work and financial loss

Income, role, routine, status, career momentum or the simple structure work once gave your days.

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO MAKE THE LOSS POSITIVE

There can be pressure to find meaning in cancer.

You may eventually find meaning. You may already have.

But you do not have to turn every loss into a lesson.

Some things were simply hard. Some things were unfair. Some things you would rather have kept.

Naming that honestly is not negativity.

A PRIVATE INVENTORY

Something cancer changed that other people can see:

Something cancer changed that most people cannot see:

Something I miss about the person or life I had before:

Something I am still learning to live with:

Something I want back, rebuild or redefine on my own terms:

WHEN SOMEONE SAYS “BUT YOU SHOULD BE GRATEFUL”

You do not have to argue.

A simple response can be enough:

“I am grateful. I am also allowed to miss what I lost.”

Or:

“Surviving something does not mean it left everything unchanged.”

ONE THING TO REMEMBER

You do not dishonour survival by acknowledging the cost of it.

Grief and gratitude can live in the same person at the same time.

Between Appointments™ provides lived-experience support and practical orientation. It does not replace medical care or provide individual medical advice.