Feelings of Grief
By Kevin Wagner

It feels like being afraid, feels like drunkenness, feels like you received a concussion, feels like suspense, compared with that of an amputee, or a river valley and with characteristics of laziness and selfishness. According to C.S. Lewis in his book, *A Grief Observed*, grief is all of these things. Like C.S. Lewis, we all experience grief sometime in our live, but it may not always be just as he described it. My experience began when I received a phone call on my way to visit Valparaiso. I just had this sudden feeling as if something were wrong when the sound of the voice pierced my ears. I could not even make out who was on the other line because they sounded so distraught. For the rest of my life, this moment in time will be stamped on my brain in permanent record. As the feminine voice on the other line spoke the words, my heart sank. A friend of mine on the other line told me Kristin, a girl I dated for six months had died early that morning in a car accident. I was speechless, and the world seemed to stop. The grief I was feeling made me feel like nothing else mattered except for Kristin. In this same sense, C.S Lewis dealt with the loss of his wife, Joy Davidman, and Tim O’Brien dealt with the loss of his fellow soldiers and the feelings of grief. Like both C.S. Lewis and Tim O’Brien, I experienced a loss too, but for me it was a girl I dated for some time in high school. Every human, C.S Lewis, Time O’Brien, me, you name it-they will deal with grief in a different way, but we share common characteristics of grief, also.

C.S. Lewis speaks of how he felt afraid in his time of grief. “I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness” (Lewis 3). From experience in the death of my friend, I know exactly what C.S Lewis meant. This exact
feeling of your stomach dropping was what I felt when I got the phone call. You just hear the words spoken and your body seems to go haywire, twisting in all different directions. This is even before your mind can even comprehend what is going on. Even years down the road, the thoughts of this person make you uneasy, as if you were confronting one of your fears.

I seemed to question myself that if I had done things differently, she might not have ever been in that situation. For example, if we would have still been together, she might have been with me and not these friends of hers. This always seemed to give me that feeling of uneasiness like Lewis talked about, almost like being afraid. In Tim O'Brien's book, The Things They Carried we hear a story about Lieutenant Jimmy Cross who feels responsible for the death of Ted Lavender. He is killed while coming back from going to the restroom where he is then shot in the head. During this time, Lt. Cross was preoccupied with thought of his "love", Martha, which leads him to blame the death upon himself. When thinking of Martha, he was not paying attention to his soldiers as he should. A Lieutenant has full responsibility for his soldier, including making sure they are safe. It is so often that humans blame death upon themselves.

Along with a feeling of being afraid, grief comes with a feeling "like being mildly drunk or concussed" so quaintly described by C.S. Lewis (Lewis 3). Not so much the aspect of drunkenness that involved the feeling of being carefree, but more the hazy feeling that goes along with being drunk. You might take this hazy feeling as the inability for a human to understand death. The thought of not seeing that one person that meant so much to you seems so unreal at times, almost impossible. I remember waking from sleep and thinking it all was just a bad dream, but then I came to the realization the accident really did happen and I must face it. C.S. Lewis depicts this well when he says, "There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me" (Lewis 3). You know everyone is there, but you seem to be in another world where no
one knows what you are going through. C.S. Lewis did not want to speak to anyone at the time, knowing no words would make him feel better and it was just awkward either way. This appears to be partially due to the fact the only thing that even comes to mind shortly after their death is contemplating every aspect of it: what you might have done to change the outcome or even just trying to picture them. He also compared the experiences of death to the feelings of a concussion. Yet again, this is that same feeling of not knowing what is going on. You wake up from this concussion and you are confused, in this state of being totally dazed. I would even go so far as to say it feels like waking up from a seizure, which almost feels the same. When I awoke from my seizure I had no clue where I was or what had happened. When a death comes, I feel it hits you just like this. For a time, you have no idea what you are doing or why you are there because your mind is so consumed with the thought of the one who passed away, whether it be a soldier, friend or loved one.

Feelings of being concussed and being afraid shed light on the story of Norman Bowker in *The Things They Carried*. Not only did he feel afraid with the death of his friend Kiowa, but he also blamed himself for the death. It was as if Bowker felt that he should have died out there if he could not save Kiowa. After the war, we see this invisible blanket that Lewis described in Bowker as he drives around the lake aimlessly. No one seems to be able to talk to him or even know what to say for that matter. This invisible blanket and blame, leads to the suicide of Bowker because there was no one to share his thoughts with. O’Brien, the author, had his books to share his feelings, where Norman Bowker had no one.

Not only does grief sometimes feel like you are in a separate world from others, but you also have this thought that nothing else matters. C.S. Lewis calls this laziness. I guess in a way you could call it laziness for the matter that you do not feel like anything else matters thus you
do not do anything. That might have been one of the harder parts of dealing with the death of my friend. I could not just stop going to school for the basic need of grieving, which might have been good. At school, I just never felt like doing anything, often I would find myself daydreaming about dates I had with Kristin, hoping that for one moment they would make me feel better about the whole situation.

Not only daydreaming, but sometimes I would even go so far as to wish for some way she could come back to life. C.S. Lewis felt after feeling such things that he was being selfish for if she would come back to life, somehow by some miracle, that would mean his wife would have to die again. Now this would mean she would have to endure this pain of death once again. At the time I never felt it to be selfish, but more of something that everyone feels when they mourn the loss of a loved one, especially with C.S. Lewis' wife. Unlike my friend Kristin, Lewis and his wife were obviously married and shared something special. Unlike Lewis, I knew Kristin was in a better place, far better than this hell we call earth from even the time I heard of her death.

As selfishness seems evident in all of us, there seems to be this feeling during grief, which C.S. Lewis describes as a feeling of suspense. Just think of a time in a movie where you were just on the edge of your seat yearning to find out what is going to come next in the film. You see no use in starting anything, for it is as if you are waiting for something else to happen. Your hopes are for this all just to be a movie playing in your brain, tricking you into thinking such an awful thing has happened. C.S. Lewis says, "It gives life a permanently provisional feeling. It doesn't seem worth starting anything. I can't settle down. I yawn, I fidget, I smoke too much. Up till this I always had too little time" (33). I remember feeling like time passed by so slowly after the death of Kristin almost as if time was standing still.
Grief appears in my life with the death of my friend, Kristin, in Tim O’Brien’s story with the death of his fellow soldier, and in the death of C.S. Lewis’ wife. Grief brings about an awkwardness between people, giving the grieving an invisible blanket. There are no words that ever seem right in the time of death. One experiences such feelings as one might undergo when they are afraid and their stomach suffers from uneasiness or during a moment of suspense when they are waiting for something else to happen. When Lewis talked of all of his feelings with grief it gave me comfort, knowing I was not the only one who felt these things. Sometimes it just takes a person with guts to write his feelings out, which in turn gives others in the same position comfort. If I could talk with Lewis, I would tell him thank you for having the will power to show the world his feelings. Through these feelings and more, we all seem to endure similar side affects like C.S. Lewis talked of in his book, *A Grief Observed*.

Works Cited