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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

Richard, having read this deeply in the editing process, I know that this beautiful piece will touch readers and bring some solace and comfort to some who need it. Thanks again for letting us publish it and for your kind words in your reply. I presume the photo is yours as well, and it's taken from the trail?

I've made only the most superficial of copy edits, but if you see anything you'd like to challenge, I do welcome such editorial arm wrestling. —All the best, Jeff

**HEADLINE ELEMENTS:**

#####BEGIN HED#####

1 Building trails into the unknown

#####END HED#####

#####BEGIN SUBHED#####

2 On the one hand, we lost these two incredible people  
3 from this Earth. On the other, I am grateful for their incredible  
4 legacies and that they were now together exploring new trails in  
5 the unknown.

#####END SUBHED#####

6 TEXT BODY:

#####BEGIN TEXT#####

7 I LIT A FIRE this morning, instantly sparking several  
8 connections in my brain.

9 For the last several days, the recent suicide of a young  
10 man in our community has opened up the portal to grief for me.  
11 I've learned that the portal opens and closes, and I've been really  
12 busy with the mundane for a while. When it opens, I need to find  
13 the time to slow down and pay attention.

14 A few days before the tragic news, I was mountain biking  
15 with some friends on a beloved trail, good for biking and  
16 walking. I have fond memories of being there: for the first time,  
17 with Angela, and, about a year ago, with an owl, really close.  
18 There is a magical and healing feel in those woods.

19 While riding, I learned some trail history.

20 The trail was built by an inspiring person whom I had the  
21 fortune of having as a neighbor when we first landed in Vermont.  
22 He later became a friend and then a co-worker. He passed away  
23 suddenly, a little over a year after Angela, when my grief portal  
24 was still wide open.

25 The thought of these two extraordinary people together,  
26 wherever that may be, had been an early experience of healing  
27 through accepting a paradox of grief: On the one hand, we lost  
28 these two incredible people from this Earth; and on the other, I  
29 am grateful for their incredible legacies and that they were now  
30 together exploring new trails in the unknown.

31 Within a few minutes of hearing the trail building story,  
32 imagining the scene and feeling that paradox of Angela and Ward  
33 together, I faintly heard an owl calling in the woods. I slowed  
34 down to take in the sound and the feeling: to have been thinking  
35 about the two of them, and then to repeatedly hear the owl,  
36 opened up the tears.

37 \* \* \*

38 THIS WAS MY FIRST mountain bike ride, a couple of  
39 months since I bruised my ribs. After just a few moments of  
40 riding, I had the tremendous feeling of joy. Of being a kid, full of  
41 laughter with a wide smile.

42 It's such a gift to have these moments to balance out the  
43 feelings of grief. When I heard the owl and connected those two  
44 people to it and to this exact place, I was joyfully biking and  
45 crying at the same time, present in that extraordinary space.

46 And somehow this morning, assembling the fire created  
47 a connection between that owl's call and the loss of that young  
48 man this week and the ripples of grief throughout the community.

49 My almost immediate reaction to the news was the  
50 thought/prayer that Angela was welcoming him in with all her  
51 tenderness, unconditional love, and acceptance. That he had her  
52 support. She was holding him.

53 And then I realized that she's been welcoming lots of  
54 people. She was such a light for people here in their dark times,  
55 and now she's doing the same in this other space.

56 \* \* \*

57 I DON'T KNOW yet, but I imagine it's a much more  
58 powerful, scary place for a lot of people, and to know that Angela  
59 and so many other ancestors are there, supporting our crossing  
60 over, brings me to tears. The similar tears to those induced by the  
61 owl on the trail — almost tears of joy, tears of acceptance, that  
62 they are there on the other side, fulfilling their new role.

63 She's on the other side, providing all the magic for  
64 people that she did here. That just feels so tremendous and  
65 purposeful for her. And offers another opportunity for me to let go  
66 in my grieving process.

67 I see her on the other side, being the same person, yet  
68 wiser from her journey. She's the same light for those of us who  
69 go there, and we all will. I feel better about losing her to her new  
70 role. I feel better for when that time comes for me and for when  
71 that time comes for others. Angela and other ancestors are there  
72 for us.

73 These portals open from time to time and I am grateful  
74 for them, grateful for these realizations, thoughts or connections  
75 that I finally make. Maybe these moments are about feeling

76 deeply, embodying what I have thought or read, that others know  
77 and have seen.

78 Sometimes I feel that I am simply having new  
79 experiences walking the same terrain, encountering new versions  
80 of myself, sometimes on the same trail.

81 \* \* \*

82 AND THEN I read this [from Sophie Strand](#), a writer who  
83 experienced the loss of a beloved friend:

84 "I was reminded of a quote from one of my favorite  
85 meditations on loss, *A Grief Observed*, by C.S. Lewis.

86 "'Grief is like a long valley, a winding valley where any  
87 bend may reveal a totally new landscape.'

88 "Grief is a landscape. A territory. You must walk through  
89 it. You must press your feet to its contours and devote your own  
90 shape [to] its foreign topography. But sometimes it reveals a new  
91 view, not of yourself or your landscape, but of the loved one  
92 lost."

93 This portal provided a new view of Angela, and all my  
94 loved ones lost. Moments like these take me around another  
95 bend, opening me up to slow down, see the view of the valley,  
96 and take in the feelings that arise.

97 As the days are getting darker and the sun is farther away  
98 from me, I am reminded to be on the lookout as I continue  
99 experiencing the new on familiar terrain.

#####END TEXT#####

BIO/COATTAIL:

#####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL#####

100 **RICHARD BERKFIELD** publishes "[GenX Widower](#)," a  
101 Substack newsletter, where this piece first appeared recently.

#####END BIO/COATTAIL#####

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

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