

TABLE FOR TWO

Magical Thinking NOW

By Dr. Linda Miles



In 2005, Joan Didion released an awe-inspiring book that was immediately hailed as a modern classic on mourning the loss of a loved one. It recounts her real-life experiences in grappling with grief and hurt following her husband's sudden death and her daughter's brain injury.

It details her memories and reanalysis of the first tragedy; after forty years of a meaningful and fulfilling marriage, her husband suffered a sudden cardiac arrest while sitting at the table as she was preparing dinner.

Didion's second book, *Blue Nights*, was devoted to a second tragedy; coping with the death of her daughter; who damaged her brain when falling as she disembarked from a plane and later fell into a coma.

In the year following her husband's death, Didion pursued *magical thinking*—in the anthropological sense, she describes this as “the feeling that you control events by wishful thinking.”

This is the belief that an unavoidable event can be averted if we just hope hard enough or bargain by performing specific actions. One such example is when Didion finds herself unable to part with her husband's shoes, because “John will come back if I don't give away his shoes.”

NOW

Mindfulness reminds us of the value of the present moment—and that the ordinary or routine does not constitute a protective barrier against loss or grief. *The*

Year of Magical Thinking is Joan Didion's cathartic roadmap for personally dealing with crushing grief and loss. It can serve as a reminder to us all to live as fully as possible in the present moment—to appreciate all that is good about it, to rejoice in it, and to take nothing for granted.

Notice. Didion took the time to grapple with her grief by choosing the avenue that came most naturally to her: to write about it. This enabled her to notice all that she was feeling and to record her emotions and reactions.

Opportunities. Acknowledging and scrutinizing her personal turmoil allowed Didion to gradually make sense of her thought process and coping mechanisms. Embracing this as an opportunity to cultivate greater self-awareness, she catapulted herself to a new understanding of grief and loss.

Within. Whether you'd choose to describe Didion's exploration of the inner workings of her mind and soul as an act of courage, desperation, need, intelligence, or compassion, the inarguable truth is that this process was fundamental in helping her survive and even thrive throughout the grieving process and beyond.

“You have to remember one life, one death—this one! To fully enter the day, the hour, the moment whether it appears as life or death, whether we catch it on the inbreath outbreath, requires only a moment, this moment.” -Stephen Levine

A YEAR OF MAGICAL THINKING—THE PATH TO MINDFULNESS

Grief therapist and meditation teacher Stephen Levine writes that we should practice the art of dying so that we can live fully in the moment. Levine asks: “If you were going to die soon and had only one phone call you could make, who would you call and what would you say? And why are you waiting?”

His teachings build off on this timeless nugget of wisdom: *“Live each day like it's your last, because one day you're going to be right.”*

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 Mindfulness Rewrites

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