

The Silent Pull of St. James Cemetery: Is Grief Meant to Be Bound?



Dr. Robin Yap

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First 100 days

The path through St. James Cemetery has become an extension of my day. Each pavement path, each tree bending in the wind, feels as though it recognizes me. Nestled in Toronto, this historic burial ground is more than a resting place for notable figures like Graeme Mercer Adam or the Jarvis family; it is where I find myself returning each day. For some, it might seem like a peculiar habit, but for me, it is where my world briefly regains balance.

Every morning, I wake, shower, shave, dress up for the weather, and feel drawn to this place. Edward's grave is where I go to stand still, speak thoughtfully to Edward's temporary headstone, or simply exist in a quiet space that somehow feels shared. I bring flowers, arrange them just so, and settle onto a stance that has borne the weight of countless others. The stillness, punctuated only by whispers of wind through the branches, an occasional passerby walking their dogs, feels like the only conversation I want to have.

But others see it differently.

"Are you sure this is helping?" My therapist asked gently during our last session. Acquaintances or even adjacent friends whom I had to speak with have been less subtle. "You're not moving on," they say. "You're going to be stuck." Their words hang in the air, heavy, judgmental even. And yet, I wonder — are they right?

They say moving forward means letting go, creating space for something or even someone new. But should I let go when everything about this place grounds me? Here, surrounded by centuries of stories etched in stone, I find a connection to Edward and to the enormity of life itself.

The graves of strangers carry their own quiet wisdom. Weathered stones bear names dating back centuries, and inscriptions hinting at lives I'll never know. Yet, in a way, I feel their presence alongside my own grief. It's a shared understanding, a reminder that while loss is deeply personal, it is also universal.

To my critics, my daily pilgrimage may seem indulgent, even obsessive. To me, it's healing. It's not about clinging to sorrow; it's about finding a way to sit with it, to honor its place in my life. Grief, I've learned, isn't something you conquer. It's something you learn to carry.

Still, doubt creeps in. Will these visits tether me too tightly to the past? Am I holding on to Edward in a way that keeps me from stepping into a future where his physical absence is constant? Each time someone questions my routine, I wonder if they see something I can't — or won't.

But how do we define "moving on"? Is it turning away from the past or finding ways to coexist with it? Could my connection to Edward live alongside the growth they say I need? Or are these visits just a way to avoid the emptiness that greets me at home every morning?

For now, I don't have an answer. The stillness of the cemetery remains a balm I'm not ready to forgo. But their words linger, pushing me to wonder: Is there a point where comfort becomes a chain? How do we know when it's time to let go of the rituals that bind us to our grief?

I wonder what others have or would have done when faced with a similar situation? Would they continue their visits, trusting their heart, or step away, following the advice of others? Does healing mean moving on or can it mean

holding on in a different way? Perhaps, like the stories buried in St. James Cemetery, the answer will take its time to reveal itself.



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