

A moment that changed me: My unbearable grief kept growing – until I found solace in a silent community

After my dad died, I tried to cope by keeping busy: a day job, a side hustle, socialising and working out. But I kept bursting into tears in public. At a Quaker meeting, it was as if someone had turned down the volume of the world

It was 2022, and my dad had just died from a rare blood disease. In the aftermath, I quit my PhD and moved back to London from Brighton. I coped by keeping incredibly busy. I regularly informed friends “I’m fine, actually”, as I threw myself into a new job in communications, went clubbing every weekend, picked up a side hustle selling secondhand clothes and got suspiciously invested in my gym routine. If I could just keep busy, I thought, perhaps I could drown out the growing tidal wave of grief.

And it worked, until it just didn’t any more. I began to burst into tears randomly – during a work meeting, at the gym, on my commute – and everyone around me would politely pretend they didn’t notice the 28-year-old man weeping on the tube at 8.30am. I tried to push through it, but my ability to keep up with my own life was faltering, and all of it – the clubs, the job, the gym – suddenly felt unbearably loud and overwhelming.

Amid the chaos, I began to take walks during my lunch breaks, to decompress. It was while I was strolling down Euston Road in London that I stumbled on Friends House, the central meeting house of British Quakers. I barely knew anything about the Quakers, and had a suspicion of religion after leaving the Anglicanism I was raised with, but I began to visit the garden regularly to unwind. One day I noticed the words “truth”, “simplicity”, “equality”, and “peace” engraved on the footpath. I became curious about who the Quakers were and what they believed.

After weeks of sitting in the garden, I nervously ventured inside the meeting house where I found a bustling coffee shop and, next to it, a shop full of books on social justice, pacifism and faith. I furtively picked up a copy of *Advices and Queries*, a small booklet that acts as a kind of mini-guide for practising Quakers.

I learned that Quakers meet to worship in silence, sitting in a circle until someone is deeply moved to speak, and that while Quakerism is founded on [Christianity](#), many Quakers are secular.

The booklet also said that Quakers should “Seek to know an inward stillness, even amid the activities of daily life”. Somewhere inside me I felt a deep yearning. I’d been so busy trying to stem the flood of grief, I wasn’t sure if I had felt any inward stillness at all in the months since my dad had died.

I went to my first meeting that Sunday. I slunk into Friends House and, after being greeted by a cheerful Quaker representative, took a chair at the back of the meeting room. People gradually filtered in until there were about 30 of us and, after everyone had settled, silence descended upon the room.

I quickly realised that I was about to spend an hour alone with my thoughts after months spent running away from them, and almost bolted out of the door in panic. But I took a second and looked around at what the experienced Quakers were doing. Some people were sitting with their eyes closed, so I copied them and shut my eyes, letting myself sink into the silence.

It was as if someone had turned down the volume of the world, and all that remained was my feelings, sitting raw and open like a wound. Rather than running, I sat for an hour and let them wash over me. I left with a fresher perspective and spent the rest of the day in a calm daze. For the first time in a while, I felt anchored to something greater than myself.

Robin and his father hold hands. Photograph: Courtesy of Robin Craig

I began to attend Quaker meetings regularly, sometimes at different meeting houses across London. Each time I went, I found the silence anew and let myself sink into it a little further. I learned more about Quaker beliefs in pacifism, equality, and protecting the environment, and met Quakers from all walks of life. Some had even taken political action based on their faith, attending anti-apartheid protests and fighting for equal marriage. Most believed in God, but others were agnostic, and while the majority were older than me, I never felt out of place or patronised.

Eventually, I started to have faith, too. I began to listen for the Holy Spirit in my day-to-day life and, as time went on, I began to question why I was keeping myself busy all the time. Gradually, I began to face the feelings I'd been running from.

I found the tsunami of grief began to slow into waves, then gentle ripples. Attending Quaker meetings hasn't made me perfect, but I believe I am kinder and more patient as a result. I try to slow down more and rush less – and I take much better care of myself. I rarely burst into tears on the tube any more.

I also have a newfound appreciation for moments of calm. I'm more aware of the clarity that stillness can bring, and I'm grateful that I found the Quakers when I needed them most. I sometimes say that I have a quiet faith – not because it's timid, but because it was found in the silence.

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<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2025/dec/03/a-moment-that-changed-me-my-unbearable-grief-kept-growing-until-i-found-solace-in-a-silent-community>