

May 9, 2021

*Nomadland*

Dear Friends,

Grief, especially early on, has been compared to being lost in a desert, or to being in the middle of the ocean in a boat without oars, or to a vast and frightening wilderness. It's all accurate. You know it as well as anyone else does.

Last night, without knowing anything about the plot, I decided to watch the winner of this year's Academy Award for best picture, *Nomadland*, and I am about to spoil the crap out of it, so I offer this **spoiler alert** for all of you who plan on seeing the movie.

Little did I realize that the entire movie is about grief. In fact, I even see the title, *Nomadland*, as an accurate metaphor for grief. Although it is a very artistic, groundbreaking movie in some ways, it is kind of surprising that it won best picture. But, then again, it's not surprising given the year we all just experienced in 2020, when everything was a bit askew. (Even watching the Oscars felt like being in *Nomadland*! It seemed like a barren wilderness this year). It is fitting that the movie to win best picture during a pandemic year is about grief and loss, loneliness, and isolation. *Nomadland* is a mixture of documentary and fiction. This is not an action-packed blockbuster. There are no plot twists or scenes that make you jump or squirm in your seat. There are real people in this movie. It's not packed with Hollywood stars. What makes this movie so special, and a winner in my opinion, is that it deals with reality - real grief, real loss, real heartache, and the real desire to avoid it all.

Who among us at one time in our life or another haven't fantasized about just running away from it all? - Getting in a van and just going and going... This is what Fern does, the main character played by Oscar winner Frances McDormand. After her husband dies and the mining plant in her town shuts down, she embarks on her journey to be a nomad - to live in her van and to keep moving. She encounters a community of 'nomads' along the way, and soon learns that she is not the only one on the road who is grieving, it seems they all are in some way.

It is a movie literally about people running away from grief (or at least attempting to). It delves into the stories of heartache and loss and explores “the meandering journey of healing through which resilience and compassion are found.” (Irene Chou, *The Brown Daily Herald*)

Fern’s meandering eventually brings her back to her town to face her loss head-on. She discovered, in her own way, like we all do, that she had to go back before she could move forward. She could not run from her grief because she took it everywhere she went. When she finally had a deep, moving conversation with a fellow nomad about loss, it opens her up to the painful realization that she needs to face her loss in order to live again. “I often say that people who refuse to acknowledge and embrace their grief are not really and truly avoiding hurt. Instead, they are choosing to die while they are alive. In denying their essential thoughts and feelings, they are throwing a blanket over their divine sparks. They are building a wall between themselves and everything that is most meaningful in life.” (Alan Wolfelt, *Grief One Day at a Time*)

The movie ends (I told you I would spoil the crap out of it!) with Fern in her van moving forward into her future. It feels like her future will be better because she faced what she needed to face and dealt with the feelings she was terrified of feeling. Before, she was running from something. And now she is moving toward something. That is the difference.

Peace and Serenity,

Kevin