

Pain Is Not a Zero Sum Game. We Can Share It.

We make assumptions: “Oh, I’m not going to tell you about my problems, you have cancer.” Yet I’ve spilled tears of ink.

December 11, 2023 By [Adam Hayden](#)

Pain is not a zero sum game, where I win, you lose. Sadly, there is plenty to go around.

Talking about pain is a little tricky, so let me precisify.

We should be thoughtful about naming pain: physical, emotional, psychological, the pain of heartbreak, the pain of disappointment, the pain of a loved one’s death, the pain of suffering, and the pain of bearing witness to it.

I don’t think we should valorize pain; except, no pain, no gain, right? Or, whatever doesn’t kill you, makes you stronger. Is that pain? Must the artist suffer? Does the spiritually transcendent sacrifice the fulfillment of basic needs to reach the enlightened plane? Is pain purposeful? Or is purpose the antidote to pain? Do we deserve pain? Does karma exist? Did I have it coming?

We treat pain like a load that we carry, and we’re always judging how strong we are by the weight of the load. Look at you, you’re so strong.

We make assumptions about others’ strength to share in the labor: Oh, I’m not going to tell you about my problems, you have cancer. Or is it the fear that if our weak bodies can help carry your load, maybe it wasn’t so heavy to begin with?

Ironically, the weight of the pain that our weak bodies carry is too heavy for some. Maybe it’s not the weight, it’s just an awkward shape. Carrying the weight of mortality is light enough for the dying to carry with each step, but the pain is so heavy that it breaks the four sturdy legs of the dinner table when our pain slips out in a joke. Oops. That shit was dark.

I’m not sure I’m in pain now. I’m not suffering. I do hurt a little. I’ve spilled tears of ink that you can wipe up with your eyes. Thanks for bearing a little witness. I feel a little better. I’d say you took some of the pain, but pain is not a zero sum game. We can share it. I’ll take some of yours. Sadly, there is plenty to go around.

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<http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/blog/pain-zero-sum-game-can-share>