

Out of the darkness, an assortment of multicolored beams of joy break through the ashen void. Life becomes more colorful. You start to notice the flowers growing alongside the sides of the road. The sky appears to be more beautiful than it ever could have been before. There are people we meet in life that bring these showers of color into our world. When this person is around, it can seem like the darkness that existed in our lives prior never existed, banished by the unbridled pure joy that this person brings. It feels like this euphoria will last forever.

Day in, and day out, we live our lives in happiness as this person brings more and more color into our lives. Each day has meaning and is well spent. Everything is perfect - until it all comes crashing down. The darkness abruptly returns. No more listening to bubbly laughter during morning coffee. No more evening walks as the sun sets. The void has reclaimed us as its helpless victim, swallowing us up whole.

The loss of a loved one is always difficult, but it is made even worse when you are facing the loss of someone who brings joy into your life. This is what the fictional character Ove faces in Fredrik Backman's book, *A Man Called Ove*. An orphan at 15, Ove's life was dreary and dull. He had everything taken away from him: his house, parents, and railroad job. After these events, he closed off his heart, not wanting to open himself up to others for fear that he would get hurt again. This is a feeling that I connected with when I read this book. I have faced mental health challenges in the past, and know how hard it is to open yourself up to others once you have been hurt.

Ove survives day by day but doesn't truly feel like he is living. However, this all changes when he meets a girl named Sonja who brings color and life into his world. Sonja loved to read, draw, and talk. Ove was quiet and didn't do these activities, but liked to listen to Sonja. They got married and lived every day together in happiness. This was until Sonja died from cancer and eventually passed away. Ove, now an old man, became more sad and bitter than he ever had been. Fired from his job and with nothing to do except for the daily security check of his neighborhood, the reader follows Ove through his trips to visit Sonja's grave and the department store, where he looks for some hooks for his ceiling.

Eventually, it is revealed that Ove plans to take his own life. Though there were clues to this beforehand in the story, I didn't pick them up, and I was shocked when I found this out. I think that this book was written this way to emphasize how you never know when someone is going through a hard time. It may look like someone is doing alright on the outside, however, this person could be going through so much more that they just haven't told anyone about.

The mental health challenges that Ove has faced hit hard for me. When I was struggling with mental health three years ago, at first I did not reach out for help. I didn't want to burden my family and friends with my problems, and I was scared of what would happen once I did explain how I was feeling. One day, I broke down in front of my mom while in the kitchen. Hands shaky, I couldn't stop crying, and eventually, all the pain I had bottled up inside spilled out. I still remember the warm hug that my mom gave me that night. After this moment, with the support from my friends and family, I was able to work on improving my mental health.

Now, three years later, I am doing much better. Not every day is perfect, but I can enjoy each day I have. Just like Ove was finally able to do at the end of his story, I was able to reach out again to the people who mean the most to me to regain the happiness and color in my life.