



Rants and Randomness with Luvvie Ajayi

A Guide To Group Travel - BONUS Episode 10

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Hey you all, welcome to Rants & Randomness. I'm Luvvie Ajayi Jones and I am here at the [Chicago Recording Company](#) bringing you all the radio voice.

I typically will have my episodes with the feel goods and my rant and my spotlight and my guest interview, but I decided to scrap that plan and talk about more of what is on my spirit right now.

I'd like to start off by saying rest in peace to [Kobe Bryant and his daughter Gianna](#), as well as the pilot and [other victims in that crash](#), Orange Coast College baseball coach, [John Altobelli](#), his wife Keri and their daughter Alyssa, Sarah Chester and her daughter Payton, who was a teammate of Gianna's and the pilot, Ara Zobayan along with the girl's assistant coach Christina Mauser.

In the wake of this horrible crash and tragic event, I was reminded of the fragility of life but also reminded me of [something that has been on my spirit for about 10 years](#), and that is a process of grieving on social media when celebrities die, celebrities who impact us, people who feel larger than life.

I realized that it's weird because when famous people die, it makes me want to be closer to people I love, and it also makes me want to drop kick people in the face. It's because we need to do better when it comes to this process.

So, first of all, this whole Kobe Bryant dying thing - it's still a shock. It's one of those things that I'll be going through the day and then I'd randomly be like, "Holy shit, Kobe Bryant died. How? That doesn't make any sense." He is one of the first athletes who is really a mega star who we got to grow up with. Michael Jordan was in the NBA the year I was born.

So, Kobe feels different from any other celebrity or any other figure because he died so young and he died in such a way that felt so unpredictable and there's still no sense in any of it. And I don't think we will necessarily find any sense in it. So it's still stunning.

I could not ignore this feeling and I decided to make this episode talking about how we process things like this in such a public sphere. So yeah, I want to talk about the stages of what happens on social media when larger than life people pass.

The first stage is the rumor of celebrity death. This one begins typically with one individual tweet that mentions that that celebrity has died. Usually that tweet will get some legs and it's retweeted by a bunch of people. Usually people are super skeptical about it because weekly there's a different celebrity death rumor, and most of them they don't pan out to be true.

We all know that there are celebrities that are alive and well, yet they are mourned on social media every week. I mean ask [Morgan Freeman, that dude has been killed on social so many times](#).

The rumor stage is where some people choose to either completely ignore the conversation while others actively question it. This is the stage that is usually the least dramatic. It's full of a lot of side eyes being thrown back and forth between everybody. I like to call this the, "We don't believe you. You need more people stage."

This stage is aggravating because one doesn't know what to believe. We saw what happened when Kobe's death was announced. First of all, I was at brunch in New York with my friends and somebody said it and I was like, "Get out of here. Twitter is playing too much once again." And yeah, it's one of those moments where you're like, "You know what, I'm just going to wait."

I'm usually of the, I ignore the conversation because I don't even like to speculate on things like that. So I'll ignore. Other, like with the Kobe conversation, it's we saw so many people's names being released next to his, people who may or may not have been there and people were just straight up guessing and reporting and people are guessing about the rumor.

So stage two of this becomes debates and arguments about the validity of source. This is the stage that begins a process of any celebrity news break source. As the news is being considered a rumor, what happens is everyone starts to argue about how valid the source that broke the story is. Whoever the original tweet started from is given extreme side eyes if it isn't a major outlet like CNN or BBC or you know, Fox, one of those.

However, what's interesting is that neither of these outlets is typically the first ever report breaking news on celebrities ever. Why? Because they actually do journalism the traditional way. They sit, they verify sources and make sure the info is correct because they have a lot to lose if it isn't. This is great of course, because it ensures their accuracy. At least that was how it used to be.

I remember when I first talked about this in 2010 that was a bit more responsibility from the traditional outlets, but now I'm seeing that they're also jumping on bandwagons like everyone else and they get a lot of it wrong.

I remember, yeah, like ABC was like Kobe and four of his kids died. Fox said Kobe and three others are killed. TMZ said Kobe survived by wife and four daughters, and people just kept on reporting inaccurate things.

When MJ died, TMZ of course broke it like they always do. I'm going to get to more of that in a bit. But they confirmed Michael Jackson's death. I remember I was sitting in my office at my full time job. It was like 4:45 PM that day, Central Time. But CNN actually took an hour and a half after TMZ first broke the news that MJ died. I guess they were trying to verify because it was too big of a mistake to make if it was a mistake.

TMZ broke the news first with a quick post on their site and a lot of people didn't believe this for at least another hour because they said, "You know what, it's TMZ. Nobody believes TMZ, it's just tabloids."

But I will say something, TMZ might not know much about history or biology, but those fools know about their celebrity news and it's a gift and a curse. They have a mole in every department in LAPD, in LA institutions, and they knew MJ died before even his family knew. Why? Because they pay everybody. They pay everybody for information and it actually happened here again. TMZ broke the news about Kobe Bryant dying before anybody else.

What is really bad about that is everybody being so insistent on being first on breaking news means we are ignoring protocol, like protocol of decency. [We found out that TMZ broke the news of the helicopter crash before the Bryant family had even been informed.](#)

Can you imagine scrolling on social and you find out that somebody that you love dearly, your dad, your husband, your uncle, your best friend passed and you found out with the rest of the world?

There's something deeply tragic about that. It feels so unethical, it feels so immoral. It does not feel anything close to decent. I hope TMZ does better. I hope we do better because this culture of first is harmful. We are not seeing people like actual people. We're just seeing things for people to click first. Everybody got to be first, and that is completely problematic.

For this social media world that we live in where everything is fast and the information superhighways at our fingertips, we got to start figuring out, yes, the capabilities of technology are one thing, but what are the things that we're going to do to ensure that technology is not ruining our spirit?

Because imagine how people felt who actually knew this man and they found out because they were scrolling on Twitter or Facebook or they somehow got a news alert on their phone. That's a problem. (8:18)

Stage 2.5 is argument about conflicting sources. When a rumor of the death is out and we're arguing about the validity of the source, someone else usually comes along to let folks know that it is indeed a rumor and the celebrity is actually fine and dandy. Unfortunately, that was not the case in this one.

But one of the people who was named as rumored on the helicopter was Rick Fox and his attorney had to come out and say, "Hey, he was not among those who were on board the helicopter." It makes me think about why we're so quick to say this knowing that it might not even be real. So we would rather retract than just chill and wait for what is true, which for me is deeply problematic.

There's a stage 2.9 that I call bargaining. What usually happens here is pretty on uncouth in my book. It's when the rumor is getting bigger and people are starting to be like, maybe it's true and people being like, "Oh, I hope he didn't die. I hope this other person did." Where people end up bargaining for three people who they think are less worthy of death. Again, it's like we forgot what decency was. I do not understand. I'm always boggled by how people behave in these moments.

Now stage three of this is when confirmation of the celebrity death by a major news source happens, so then it becomes fact in everybody's head. This used to be when CNN finally picks up the death of a celebrity and they tweet it as breaking news or they post something or they interrupt a program for it.

These days though, the confirmation comes from the press conference of the first responders or TMZ. What's interesting is that oftentimes the major news outlets sites the source that originally broke the news on Twitter or another tweet confirming the death.

This confirmation, what follows is what gets really ugly and what I hope we start reflecting on about how we operate, which is when everyone goes into full fledged mourning mode. What does this look like?

Well stage four, for hours on end, Twitter, social media, Facebook, all of them, Instagram, ends up mourning for the celebrity that has passed on. There's one piece of it that's comforting because you feel a collective pain that

is somewhat comforting because you know that all over the world there are people who are feeling the same type of despair as you, right?

But there are typically two types of ways people tweet during this time. There are the folks who actively pay homage to the celebrity. Whole timelines are full of tweets remembering them, tweeting links to their work, their music, their films, their quotes, everything. We truly pay homage to their lives.

Then there are the people who go above and beyond to prove that they were indeed stans of this person. Sometimes people try to outstan each other and it becomes a competition of who is the biggest fan and who deserves to grieve them more.

It can get really ridiculous because what happens is people start questioning other people like, "Well, you didn't have his Jersey. Oh God, you hated him when he was alive because you guys were sports rivals." This is actually where people start to show their asses a little bit too much because they end up acting as if death and mourning people is some sort of acts that requires qualification.

Like you have to prove that you are worth grieving this person or you've never seen anything wrong about them or everything about their lives was something that you cheered on while they were here.

More recently what people are doing, especially with this Kobe death is that people are of course bringing up the case against him when he was 27 where he was accused of raping a 19-year-old woman. He ended up getting acquitted. They went to civil court, they settled out of court.

Very quickly after his death people were bringing that up as a way to I guess make other people feel bad for mourning this larger than life figure. I realized that we really do not do death well on a public sphere. I know it's hard but the arguments happened very quickly after.

All I kept on thinking about was there are people who knew this man, who are still sitting here looking at their phone because he just text them that morning and being like, now I also have to see all of this. It's a lot.

Then there's stage five, which is the argument about how folks grieve. Folks will throw themselves on the caskets, oh my son, why Lord? I'm usually of this group, I admit. It's just when you're in disbelief at how young or healthy or viral this person was or how big they seemed or how invincible they seemed and them being gone so sudden and so final. This is natural.

I think it's important that we let folks lament in peace. In the moments when the people who we consider legends and icons pass, it feels surreal because we take it for granted that they were here because they feel almost superhuman and like superheroes and usually superheroes don't die. So when they die in real life, it is a gut punch. It is a punch to your face and your spirit.

It's one of those things that even though we don't know them, even though we are not, we might not have met them or have a personal story, they've somehow impacted our lives in a way that it feels visceral when we find out that they're no longer here and to find out that their story is no longer going to continue, to find out all we have is what they've already done and we will see nothing new.

It's a shocking, shocking experience and a lot of times people try to make you feel bad for grieving somebody who you've never met. But I think about there are people who we've never met who have left imprints on our

lives that we cannot ever erase. There are people who we might never see them in person, but the music they created somehow pulled us out of a dark time, or a game that we watched that they played, made us believe that you can actually fly.

Or people who write things that touch our hearts and speak our pain and put it in black and white. We deserve to mourn people who have touched us no matter how far they are from us.

Also in this, there are people who will constantly question that and say like, "Well, if you didn't check for that celebrity since May don't say RIP." Or, "This person has a complicated legacy, why are we crying for them?" Why would we not? Who is not flawed in this world? We're all flawed in different ways.

But for me, I found that it was really, it was interesting how quick some people were to basically be like remind everybody about the worst moment of this man's life, especially. Yeah, that was tough. And I continue to see that and I had to log off social because it also showed that in our world, we don't necessarily believe in redemption.

No matter what people think, who we are in our worst day, that can be our legacy if we continue to be that person. I think there's something to be said for people who changed their lives and who do things different after they make horrific mistakes. There's power in being able to change and grow. I think we should honor that.

So, yeah, I think there's something as common courtesy. Let folks pay respect and shut up sometimes. Just because one isn't that celebrity's biggest fan does not mean their death won't have some effect. Any human life loss should be able to be acknowledged without judging and us people having to say something about it. Everybody is not a cartoon villain.

When certain people die who are known to be pedophiles and serial rapists and just awful villains, we might tap dance, okay, in celebration. But not everybody. People who are proving over and over again that they are living a life that is about growth, about change, about positive things, I think it's going to be tough for people who saw them in a good light.

Yeah. Then there are of course, the people who will post, "You know, I'm not sure why you guys are making a big deal out of this. People die every day. Besides, why is this celebrity's life worth more than anybody else's?" Yeah. This happens and it's missing the point. It's missing the point. Everybody's life matters.

But there are some lives that when they are on this earth will touch millions of people and if we cry for them more, it's not because their lives are worth more than anybody else's, it's that the hole that they left feels bigger and feels like it can't necessarily be filled.

We've done this process over and over again with every celebrity, especially black ones. I see it happening a lot with black celebrities who pass. People are really, really quick to instantly tread out who they were on their worst days. I don't necessarily see it in that same way with white celebrities who pass, who might have done awful things in the past over and over again mind you, okay.

These are people who didn't necessarily grow, but they're allowed to be mourned and grieved and they're spoken about in positive words and they are amplified because of the best work that they've done.

There is one other mini stage in that, which is inappropriate jokes about death. It's just like, I understand that humor allows us to work through it, but it is not sometimes appropriate to laugh about everything. Yeah. It's just, it's wild. I think for me there's a lot of lessons here.

Anytime a major celebrity dies, a major figure passes on, it's always shocking. It's always varying levels of shocking. I'm trying to figure out what the lessons are and being able to do it in social media, we're all mourning out loud and we get to watch how other people are mourning and there's a couple of lessons that I want to hold on to.

We have to deal with the speed versus accuracy problem, like we're breaking all kinds of rules of the golden rules. Just because a person is a celebrity, that doesn't mean that they or their family are outside the lines of common courtesy. We are turned into monsters.

One of those things that I think is important for us to do in this moment is to understand that none of this is promised. We have to hold the people that we love dear. CBS reported a fan who had come up to grieve at the crash site as saying, "When we lose a hero, we gain a sense of our own mortality." It's true.

I know we say life is short. It's very cliché. A lot of times it loses its meaning. For me, I am reminded every single time when it comes to deaths like this that we have to live life loudly and urgently. It doesn't just mean that we yell about what we want to do. It means every day is a chance to take steps that get us closer to our dreams because this ritual we have of waking up in the morning is the most unpromised thing.

It's a habit that can end anytime. The people who think they have more time, I don't understand because we assume that we'll have tomorrow. I'm sure everybody who got on the helicopter assumed they had tomorrow just because it's easy for us to assume that we'll just wake up the next day, we'll be fine. But a lot of times that's not what happens.

I'm always stunned by the reminders of how fleeting this all is. I'm humbled by the chest punches that come with when greats are gone because accomplishments and medals might make people seem invincible, but death is a master of all. We're all living in our own corners of the world, both insignificant because we're one of 1.75 billion but also significant because each of our lives is a weave in the fabric of humanity and what we do matters.

While we're here living through fear, spending each day hating ourselves, our lives and our circumstances, is another day we take it all for granted. I really hope that we all live not afraid to love or do or be exactly what brings us joy.

May we all live in a way where our absence would be missed. May we live and those we leave behind are okay because they know that our lives were full. I don't know if any silver linings can be grasped from this tragedy because honestly it doesn't make sense.

I'm always trying to stand on something. I'm always trying to be like, okay, something has to come from this that feels good or something has to come from this, emerge from this that would at least make it not seem so senseless because it does not make sense. It does not make sense.

I'm going to therapy today and I'm really happy about that because child I'm just going to sit in this lady's couch and lay all my burdens down and honestly right now I'm sending love to anybody who is touched by this tragedy

and if you're hurting and you need to talk or need resources, here is your regular reminder from me that therapy is where that work can be done to get your own path to healing.

One thing that social media lets me know each and every day is that there are so many people who are hurting and in need of healing. How we've been throwing things at the wall and how we throw hate at each other and how even the comments that I'm seeing related to this tragedy and people's just terrible behaviors, letting me know folks got to heal.

There's so many people who are hurting and I really recommend therapy because look, our friends can't help us all the time. Our family can't be the only ones who we're telling how we're feeling. There is no better time than now to think about going to therapy, especially black men I'm thinking about you. It has to be prioritized.

I'm going to put some links in the show notes and on my website AwesomelyLuvvie.com with therapy resources because if people are like, I don't know where to start, I want you to know exactly where to go.

I found my therapist on psychologytoday.com. There is a resource called Open Path Collective that can help you find therapists in your area no matter whether you have insurance or not. Then there's also therapyforblackgirls.com which has resources in their database to help you find therapists that are culturally sensitive and black. There's Therapy for Black Men, which is new and I'm so glad it exists.

So again, check the show notes and you'll see the links for this. I have ... I'll put it on the website with all the transcript for this and I'll continue to take care of myself in this moment because I think this feels like a family. It's almost like a family member. Even though I never knew him, never met him, knowing his daughter perished with him and the rest of the people on the helicopter.

But through this all you would think being on social media would be comforting. On this process, it's actually made it more painful because I'm seeing how people are not taking this well and taking it out on other people. And for me that is making it worse because I'm like we should, especially in moments like this, find ways to be better and do better.

This should inspire us to want to leave this world better than we found it. This should inspire us to want to be kinder, to want to love louder, to be a little bit more graceful and to figure out what people will say when we're no longer here.

So the fact that right now I'm seeing some of the worst of people, I'm like, "Bro, this is the opposite. Let's do better. My peoples. Let us do better."

So yeah, just wanted to come on and do that. My next show I'll get back to my regularly scheduled program with a really good guest and be in good conversation, but this was on my heart. This was on my spirit.

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