



2017/2018
Edition

L.I.F.T.

Living Is For Today

A SOURCE OF STRENGTH AND SUPPORT FOR THOSE FACING GRIEF

Thoughts

It can't be true
It isn't possible
Yet here I am
Standing alone
Lost in my thoughts

How could I not see that you were ill?
How could you not tell me that something was wrong?
Now I am alone... all alone
My thoughts aren't keeping me company
They only make me miss you more

My crying is getting less
But sleep has yet to come
I wander the house
Looking for a sign from you
I think I catch one... but I'm not sure

They say time will help
I don't believe them
Again, they say it takes time
Time is all I have
I'm lost in my thoughts of you

Symbolism of The Waterfall

Water is one of the four crucial elements for life, and in most cultures is a symbol of change and a sign of life. The symbolism of the waterfall is the idea of continuous creation and the rejuvenation and renewal of spirit.

Janis Worden

LEANING INTO GRIEF



By Christine MacMillan, BSW, MSW, RSW

Grief is something we would prefer to avoid. We don't like thinking about it, yet alone talking about it. So why would you want to lean into your grief, and what does that exactly mean?

We will, if we have not already, experience grief after the death of a loved one. If we've attached to and loved someone, then we will surely, but unwillingly, go through the grief process after their death. We will have no choice in the matter...grief will happen to us. Grief is messy, incredibly painful, outside of our control and will affect our hearts, heads and bodies. It is not something anyone wants to experience. However, love and grief are the opposite sides of the same coin. Grief is inevitable after loving.

It's certainly counterintuitive to want to feel pain, whether it be physical or emotional. Since it is more natural to move away from pain and not towards it, we find ways to keep busy or distracted, we numb ourselves with work or substances, or we talk ourselves out of feeling pain. Our mourning avoiding society supports and encourages us to "get over", rush through or by-pass this natural process.

Yet, this is exactly what we must have the courage to experience. This is the type of pain we must openly acknowledge, explore, feel and process for it to eventually lose its control over us and allow us to move toward creating a new life with purpose and meaning.

During the acute period of grief when we're emerging from the shock and numbness, grief overshadows everything and the pain worsens. It is during this time we must resist the temptation to move away from the grief and instead learn ways to embrace it without becoming overwhelmed. We must cultivate ways to keep grief center stage. It is only in this way that we accomplish a very important grief task of acknowledging the painful reality. This takes us back to why would you want to move toward pain? It is because the alternative leads to a far worse outcome.

As perplexing as it may seem, when you resist your intense grief feelings, they do not go away. Instead, they linger and hurt more deeply when they resurface. Although grief evolves over time, we must be careful to work on it in a healthy way so that it does not evolve into something more complicated. When we choose to ignore or bypass the pain of grief, we're left with unresolved grief which can make us feel 'stuck' and unable to live a full life.

Leaning into your pain means having the courage to find healthy ways to express your feelings outside of yourself, or, in other words, you mourn. In this way, your intense grief feelings gradually diminish in intensity. They become subtle. They soften and blend into the new life you are creating. You will then be able to hold your softened grief feelings tenderly in your heart along with your love.



Still Walking with Rhetta

By Katherine Bryce

Rhetta and I met in 1995, when we were both students at the University of Toronto. She was a linguistics major, and I was studying engineering. Our paths crossed at Varsity Arena, where we ended up playing on the same intermural hockey team. As I got to know Rhetta better, I felt that I had surely found a true friend and foil with whom to travel on this journey of life. Five short years later I learned that we were destined to share a much different journey - a much shorter journey - as her exhaustion and headaches were found to be the result of a brain tumor. It was after the surgery that I heard the name "glioblastoma multiforme" for the first time, followed by words "this is a terminal cancer, but we'll try to control it as long as we can". I was numb. The internet provided cold clean facts - 14 weeks. Three months. Six months. When I did hear the prognosis I actually felt some relief - one to two years. In comparison, it seemed long. In my heart, I knew better.

In the end Rhetta lived for almost 23 months from the date of her initial diagnosis. Twenty-three months containing two surgeries, five weeks of radiation therapy, nearly a dozen rounds of chemotherapy, about 10 MRIs, several CT scans, stereotactic radiosurgery, and innumerable blood tests. But also, many trips to the cottage, more than half a dozen trips to Nova Scotia to see her family, witnessing her first niece learn to walk and talk, living to see her second niece born, and knowing that another niece or a nephew was "on the way", a snowboarding trip to Whistler, summer hockey, mountain biking, three completed triathlons, and many, many walks: in our neighborhood, in the peace of Mount Pleasant cemetery, and at the cottage. Twenty-three months of anger, sadness, joy, exhilaration and fulfillment.

During the last trip we took to Nova Scotia together, in May of 2002, we hiked the Cape Split trail. It is a beautiful trail through widely varying landscape to a rocky bluff jutting out into the Bay of Fundy. As we hiked back to the trailhead she stopped me: "Just promise me that you will never forget you're alive", she said. I will never forget that moment. It's a harsh reality that it is only through loss that we truly realize how much we take for granted.

In July 2002 I drove to Nova Scotia once again, bringing the ashes of my sweetheart home to be buried in Berwick cemetery with her ancestors. When I returned to Ontario I decided to spend a week at my cottage. One day I was up in our wooded lot with my binoculars, watching the birds. I came across a fallen ironwood tree, which is not unusual because there are many ironwoods, and quite often there are several dead ones lying around, waiting to be picked up and thrown into the BBQ pit.

I saw this one - it was very straight with few branches, which is usual for ironwoods - and I thought to myself "that is the perfect size for a walking stick".

There really was no reason for me to fixate on making a walking stick, something I've never done before, out of that particular ironwood tree, other than it seemed to beg for it. So I dragged it down, and plopped it behind the cottage where the wood shed is. I left it there, and the next day my dad commented on it, saying that he was going to cut it up to use it for the BBQ that night.

I debated with myself whether to say anything about wanting it for a walking stick, or just letting him cut it up and forget about the idea. But for some reason, I felt obliged to make the stick. I felt silly about it. I even said to myself, "this is ridiculous, that tree has nothing to do with Rhetta". But because I believe that those strong feelings we sometimes get are deeply rooted messages and ought to be heeded, I felt I should follow through with my plan. I went inside and told my dad I wanted the top part for the walking stick. I helped him cut the rest up for the BBQ, and had him stop a few inches above where I wanted to make the cut for the handle. There was a good bulb there which would make a perfect grip.

I went and got the handsaw and cut it where I wanted it. When I was finished cutting, I looked at the cut face, and honestly, there is a perfect heart shape in darker wood in the middle of the face. I swear to you, it is perfect. I have never seen anything like it. I suppose it had everything to do with Rhetta. I'll never know. When nature smiles at you, there's nothing you can do but feel blessed.

I finished the stick and varathaned it so it shines. I kept the top portion of the cut too, because here is the unusual thing: where my dad made the cut with the chainsaw, there is no heart shape. Clearly the message was meant for me.

One of my favorite writers is Wally Lamb. He wrote a great book called "I Know This Much is True". In the last paragraph he cites as one of those things which he knows to be true is that "the proof of God exists in the roundness of things". I like this statement because, though I am not a religious person and do not believe in God as a divine being, it allows a certain degree of flexibility in an interpretation of God. God may "simply" be a pattern or fluidity or interconnectedness in what often appears to be a totally chaotic world. I think that this curious occurrence is a great example of the roundness of things.

What I know for sure is, I will carry her words and my promise with me for the rest of my life, and when I carry those words and my beautiful stick, I am still walking with Rhetta.



The Pain of the Mundane

A young widow has some advice for going back to work...
and facing 4 other toughies after losing a spouse.

The death of a spouse — particularly when you're young and dreamed of sharing a long, happy life together — is chaotic, heartbreaking and surreal. Two years ago, when I lost my husband to West Nile Virus, getting on with my life felt nearly impossible. There were many situations when I thought, *"I just can't."* For others experiencing a similar loss, here are five scenarios to prepare for — and some suggestions for facing them down with as much courage as you can muster.

Going Back To Work

Few people have the luxury of staying under the covers until the grief subsides. For most of us, going back to work isn't an option — in fact, it may be even more of a financial imperative than ever. And comfort can be found in the day-to-day routine of your job. From waking up at the same time every day to participating in that Monday morning staff meeting to completing your office task list, the predictability of knowing where to go and what to do can feel good.

Keep in mind that at first, engaging with colleagues may feel awkward — for you, and for them. There will be people won't know what to say, or unintentionally say the "wrong" thing. So come up with a "catchphrase" for these situations. For me, "It's nice to see you" answered everything from "How are you holding up?" to "I heard what happened..." It didn't matter that it didn't always make sense, people got the hint that while I appreciated their sympathy, I just wasn't ready to engage much further.

Going Back To School

Events around the kids, if you have them, are particularly difficult as you want to be there, you need and/or have to be there, but it's difficult for a variety of reasons. A few weeks after my husband died, there was a series of holiday concerts at my daughter's middle school. Some people avoided making eye contact; others burst into tears at the sight of me.

Thankfully, I had friends there to protect me from the unwanted, albeit well meaning, attention of others. Recruiting a friend or relative to join you at the school event, (or dance recital or soccer game) may help you feel less alone, plus your kid will appreciate the extra audience.

Errands, Etc.

The logistics of life don't stop just because you're grieving: There are still groceries that need to be purchased, a car that needs gas, dry cleaning that needs to be dropped off. Ask friends and family who offered "anything" to help with specific tasks. I once

asked a friend take me to the post office to mail a simple letter. Another friend organized a meal train so that I didn't have to worry about cooking — this lasted for months! Another friend came over once a week to help me sort through the hospital bills and medical insurance claims. She also brought trashy magazines. My advice: Start small — one task per day — and in time, the fog will start to clear, and moving forward on your own may not feel as daunting.

Socializing

Believe it or not, there will come a time when that dinner invitation or offer to see a movie or just going for a walk with a friend will sound appealing. And when it does, go — even for just an hour. I forced myself to attend the same New Year's Eve party that we went to as a family for years. It was extremely difficult walking into the party without my husband. I quickly went into the uncontrollable "ugly cry" upon arriving, but you know what? I'm glad that I was able to keep up with the tradition — for my daughter and myself. We cried, yes, but we were able to toast in a new year surrounded by friends and loved ones. Granted, we didn't stay as long as we normally would have, but everyone understood why.

There were other celebrations that first year though, that I deliberately opted out of (like Father's Day with extended family) because it simply would have been too upsetting. Trust your instincts about what you can handle and make no apologies for sending regrets, leaving early or even changing your mind about attending at the last minute.

Making Decisions

When you're grieving, even small decisions, like what to make for dinner, can feel overwhelming. So when it comes to making even bigger decisions — what to do with the personal items left behind, whether or not to sell assets — give yourself time, if you can. Soon after my husband died, my impulse was to get rid of everything: his clothes, his office, and his music collection. Now, nearly two years on, I'm grateful to have kept some of my husband's t-shirts, and even a few pairs of his socks. The thing is, small stuff can easily get lost in the big stuff, so try waiting until you know the difference.

Melissa Gould is a writer who lives in Los Angeles with her teenage daughter and her neurotic dog. She's online at melissagould.net and on Twitter @TheMelissaGould.

I DON'T WANT TO BE HEALED

The Classifieds

There are certain terms that are routinely used to classify experiences that are unequivocally different from each other. Classification, as in diagnosis, has utility in that an accurate diagnosis can determine an appropriate course of treatment for an individual. Classification also has from my perception, a major downside: it prevents us from appreciating the totality of the experience. For example, individuals who are sad from changes in life circumstances, due to loss and divorce may be labeled as depressed. Being sad and being depressed have different meanings. For example, the extreme sadness that results from loss can subside or become more manageable with proper support and a willingness to change our perspective. Depression is a debilitating condition that impacts a person's ability to function and negatively impacts all areas of their lives. I believe that we are too quick to classify, diagnose or attempt to pigeonhole individuals' experiences without understanding the totality of that experience.

As a person who has experienced the death of a child, I have given much thought to the terms that have been used to try to describe our experience or to try to provide us hope and comfort. One term that is commonly used in this context or in the context of any life-altering transition is "healed" or "healing." Here is a four-part definition that I found online: 1. To restore to health or soundness; cure; 2. To set right; repair; healed the rift between us; 3. To restore (a person) to spiritual wholeness; 4. To become whole and sound; return to health (Retrieved from: <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/healing>).

There are two main components to this definition. The first is the healing that occurs from physical injury or disease; the second refers to the restoration of a person to spiritual wholeness. The second part of this definition will be my focus for this article.

Undermining the Experience

The first recollection that I have of questioning the use of the term "healing" following Jeannine's death was when I was watching news coverage in the aftermath of the Virginia Tech shootings. The newscasters (and I am paraphrasing) were commenting on how great it was that the students were coming back to school just days after the incident, and how this was an indication that the healing could now begin. I remember wanting to emphatically proclaim to these newscasters, that, from my perspective, their comments were not accurate. If anything, their comments served to undermine the present experience of these students.

Let the Healing Begin?

First of all, the Virginia tech shootings and other similarly catastrophic events drastically alter our perceptions of the world and threaten our safety in that world. The entire culture of that college community was forever changed, not only for the current population but also for future

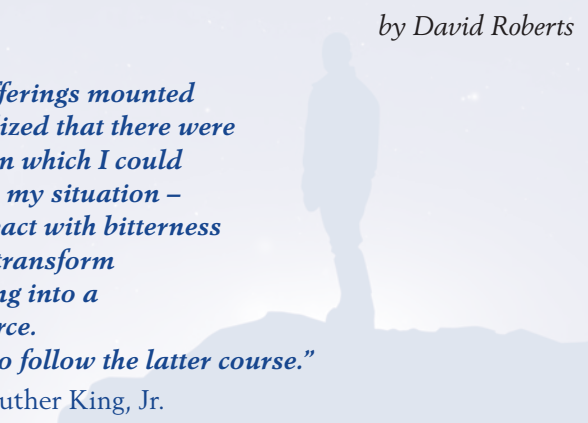
students enrolling in that school. The event demanded that the students who were left in the aftermath of the shooting reassess their assumptions about safety and predictability as a part of college campus life. I would not dispute that healing is a necessary part of adjusting in the aftermath of tragic loss, but it doesn't begin immediately. We have to focus first on survival, a day, sometimes a minute at a time. . Returning to a routine that is comfortable is one way we deal with events that defy human law. It is our most basic form of survival and a way to distract us from the pain. We begin our healing spiritual journey after loss, only after we have made the conscious decision to live by finding meaning in a world that has become different. Does this mean we return to spiritual wholeness, as the definition of healing suggests? I am not so sure that it does.

The Process of Redefinition

A return to spiritual wholeness implies that when we "heal" from catastrophic loss, we were either spiritually whole to begin with or that we pick up where we left off prior to catastrophe, with no further lessons to be learned. I do not believe that we become whole after loss, but that we become redefined. We are not the same people anymore. The process of redefinition, like the journey after my daughter Jeannine's death, is life long. For me, there will be no end to the spiritual lessons that I will learn. I can also revisit the pain of my daughter Jeannine's death (and have) anytime on my journey. The pain of a child's death, though becoming softer in later years, resurfaces in varying intensity until we are called to eternal life. Our pain becomes woven into the tapestry of our redefined lives and if we let it, can be a catalyst to help others and to help us develop further insight into our own existence.

I will never consider myself to be healed from loss. Being healed implies that there are no more lessons to learn and no more wisdom to share. I will always consider myself to be in a state of healing. I will be forever committed to awareness of the messages that are contained in all that is a part of the universe and to hopefully inspire others to walk in awareness. In a state of healing, I will continue to transform and continue to grow.

by David Roberts



***"As my sufferings mounted
I soon realized that there were
two ways in which I could
respond to my situation –
either to react with bitterness
or seek to transform
the suffering into a
creative force.
I decided to follow the latter course."
~ Martin Luther King, Jr.***



How to Help a Friend

By Bill Jenkins

Recognize that everyone grieves at their own pace.

Some progress rather quickly, some move very slowly. We never move at the speed that others think we should. Help us take one day at a time.

Keep us company and be there for us.

You don't need to say anything profound or do anything earthshaking. Often, your greatest help is your quiet presence and simplest deeds.

Make suggestions and initiate contact and activities.

It is important for you to respect our privacy and give us some time alone, but we also may not have the energy to structure our lives right after a traumatic loss. We may have to rely on others to think of things that we don't know to ask for.

Provide a safe environment for us to show strong emotions.

It may be very painful, but it can be of enormous help.

Help us remember good things.

Tell us your memories of our loved one as you listen to us tell you ours. If we begin to show our emotions outwardly, you have not upset us, you have simply enabled us to be a bit more open in your presence.

Be there after the first wave is over.

Make the effort to call, to come by, to help us out six months and even a year down the road. Crowds may be difficult for us. Shopping and holidays will be overwhelming. Offer your help. If we're not up to a visit we'll let you know, but let us know you remember and are there for us.

Listen to us.

We need to tell our story over and over in order to process our grief. We may even say outrageous things. Don't judge us by what we say or how we feel. We have a lot to work through, and in time we will come to the answers that are right for us.

Be careful of clichés, religious platitudes, or easy answers.

You may not be able to help us with certain issues right now, so don't be too quick to share your opinions if we say something you don't agree with. We need time to work things out on our own.

Be sensitive to our needs, be patient, have confidence and believe in us.

We will get better, we will experience healing; but it will take some time, and it can be rough going for much of the way.

Be on the lookout for destructive behaviors.

Traumatic loss can lead some people into depression, alcohol or drug abuse. We may need you to keep an eye on us while things are especially tough.

Help us find humorous diversion.

Laughter is good medicine.

Be willing to do difficult things with us.

We may need someone to sit with us in court; we may need a safe place to rage; we may need help with the funeral or afterwards. There may be some hard times ahead and facing them alone can be terrifying.

Help us find ways to bring good things out of the bad.

It is important that our loved one be remembered and memorialized.

Find out about grief.

Read some of the books that are available. The more you know, the better able you will be to help us.

Help us to find support and inspiration.

Often, a poem or song will speak to us in ways that no one else can. Also, talking to someone who has survived a similar loss can help us to realize that we are not alone in our grief.

We have to go through this valley in order to get to the other side.

Dealing with grief cannot be avoided or postponed. Grief can make relationships difficult and you may get frustrated with us or feel uneasy around us. But please remember that now, more than ever, we need the caring and patient support of our friends and family. Help us get through this as well as we are able. Your true friendship and companionship, your kindness and patience can help us get our lives back together. We will experience some level of grief over our loved one's loss for the rest of our lives. Some days will simply be better than others. One day, we hope to reach a point where our good days outnumber the bad. That will be a major milestone for us.

Thank you for being here for us.

Letter to a Friend

Grief is hard on friendships, but it doesn't have to be. Sometimes all it takes is a little honesty between friends. If we gently and lovingly explain what we need from the relationship during our time of grief, and what we are willing to do in return, we can turn even a lukewarm friendship into something special. Share the following letter with a friend over lunch. You'll both be glad you did.

Dear Friend,

Please be patient with me; I need to grieve in my own way and in my own time. Please don't take away my grief or try to fix my pain. The best thing you can do is listen to me and let me cry on your shoulder. Don't be afraid to cry with me. Your tears will tell me how much you care.

Please forgive me if I seem insensitive to your problems. I feel depleted and drained, like an empty vessel, with nothing left to give. Please let me express my feelings and talk about my memories. Feel free to share your own stories of my loved one with me. I need to hear them.

Please understand why I must turn a deaf ear to criticism or tired clichés. I can't handle another person telling me that time heals all wounds.

Please don't try to find the "right" words to say to me. There's nothing you can say to take away the hurt. What I need are hugs, not words.

Please don't push me to do things that I'm not ready to do or feel hurt if I seem withdrawn. This is a necessary part of my recovery.

Please don't stop calling me. You might think you're respecting my privacy, but to me it feels like abandonment.

Please don't expect me to be the same as I was before. I've been through a traumatic experience, and I'm a different person. Please accept me for who I am today.

Pray with me and for me. Should I falter in my own faith, let me lean on yours.

In return for your loving support I promise that, after I've worked through my grief, I will be a more loving, caring, sensitive, and compassionate friend—because I would have learned from the best.

Love, (Your name)



BEREAVEMENT SERVICES & COMMUNITY EDUCATION

*A Division of the Humphrey Funeral Home
A.W. Miles-Newbigging Chapel Limited*

We have a selection of helpful brochures and other information, all available at no charge. Please call if you would like to receive any of the following:

Anticipatory Grief: What is it?
Funeral Etiquette
Good Grief!
Helping Bereaved Siblings Heal
Helping Children Cope With Death
Helping Each Other After Suicide
Helping Infants and Toddlers When Someone They Love Dies
Helping Teenagers Cope With Grief
Helping Your Family Cope When A Pet Dies
Helping Your Family When a Member is Dying
Helping Yourself Heal When a Baby Dies
Helping Yourself Live When You Are Seriously Ill
How Do Dead People Get Chocolate Cake?
I Can't Face The Holidays!
Living Through Grief
Multicultural Funeral Practices
My Child Has Died!
Should Children Know About Death?
The Grief That Can't Be Spoken
The Grieving Family
When a Young Friend Dies
When I Grow Too Old To Grieve
When Your Parent Dies
When Your Spouse Dies

Also available is our large selection of Bereavement books located in our library on the second floor. These can be loaned out to the public for 14 days, at no charge. In this day and age, so much information can be obtained from the Internet. If you go to the Bereaved Families of Ontario website (www.bereavedfamilies.net) they have articles as well as videos which can help as a supporting aid to those family members who are grieving.

DID YOU KNOW - Both WestJet and Air Canada provide reduced bereavement airfares in the event of a death or imminent death in your immediate family. See carrier websites for more details.

Message from the President

As the President of the Humphrey Funeral Home A.W. Miles-Newbigging Chapel Limited I feel it is important to share with you some of my thoughts.

You may have recently experienced the death of someone loved, and it is our hope that we, your funeral directors of choice, helped you during this very difficult time of your life. I, also have experienced the death of a grandparent, father, mother, sisters, staff members, close relatives and some dear friends. I experienced hurt, pain and confusion, yet I feel it helped me to become a better funeral director. Often I have thought about how frustrating it must have been for you, as an individual who had to deal with a situation that was completely foreign to you. A funeral home should be a home away from home at the time of a death, and we must be a family of professionals who are there to serve your family to the best of our ability. In other words, we should be a resource prior to a death as well as during the time following a death. Also, you have become a resource person for others, because you have experienced the many options available to you as you were required to make many decisions over a short period of time. Do you remember those over 100 decisions you had to make within the first twenty-four to thirty-six hours? As one says, pass it on. May I suggest you pass on your valuable knowledge by offering your help to the next person that you encounter who will experience a death.

Furthermore, because of possible confusion that exists for some people, please allow me to view my profession, as I'm sure you do, from outside of my work environment. You and I have observed an array of choices from corporately run funeral homes answering to shareholders, to cemeteries now trying to offer funeral service directly to the public. It makes you wonder who to turn to, and if you are receiving value for the money you have spent. It has almost become a situation of "buyer beware." I could expand on all these areas, but that is not my intent. Yet I, and our staff, are always available to discuss these, or any other related subjects.

The message I wish to convey to you is that for over 135 years our firm has endeavoured to be a safe place of trust for people to turn to at a time of need. Therefore, please remember we're here, without any obligation, to answer your questions and to try to provide an unbiased perspective for you to rely on. It is my hope that my family will continue, as did my father, his father, and his father before him, to offer the highest level of service available and assist you through the maze of decisions that are often associated with this potentially vulnerable time.

Simply put, as the old adage claims, no matter where you search to obtain value for the products and services provided, you only receive what you pay for. A funeral home must, and should, offer all available options to everyone, including a full range of prices or options, with the hope that the families they serve will feel that the service they received exceeded the level of service they expected.

I am extremely encouraged by the comments of affirmation which our staff are receiving with regard to our L.I.F.T. Newsletter. These statements are not only from families whom we serve, but also in the bereavement sector within our community. Through our Community Education Department we are very pleased to be in a fortunate position to continue to give back to the community, which has supported us for over a century.



Bruce T. Humphrey
President