

GRIEVING *FORWARD*

DEATH
HAPPENED
NOW WHAT?

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*A Practical Guide for
Healing & Understanding
the Grief Process*

CATHY CLOUGH & LINDA POULIOT

The logo features a stylized leaf or flame shape above a horizontal wavy line.

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Grieving Forward: Death Happened, Now What?

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The information and solutions offered in this book are intended to serve as guidelines for healing after the death of a loved one. Please discuss specific emotional and/or physical issues, symptoms, or medical conditions with your physician.

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This book is dedicated to you, dear friend.
We are sorry your loved one has died.
We hear your cries of sorrow;
we acknowledge your grief and pain.

Our prayer for you is healing.
Please accept the gift of hope and healing
which is wrapped in love throughout
each and every page of this book.

Even though it seems impossible right now,
healing is possible.

Allow the information in this book to support,
guide, and encourage you as you journey along
the path of grief, all the way to the destination
of healing, acceptance, and new beginnings.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A note from Cathy:

I would like to thank Mary Lindquist, the hospice nurse who helped my family when my first husband Don was dying. Mary saw something in me that I did not see and hired me to start a bereavement program at Arbor Hospice and Home Care. Because of the door that Mary opened for me, fourteen years later, I was able to take a “leap of faith” and establish New Hope Center for Grief Support, a non-profit, Christian based grief support center.

I would also like to thank John and Betty Baird, who made it possible for New Hope Center for Grief Support to become a reality. Thank you, John and Betty, for your continued support, friendship and prayers for the ministry of New Hope.

I’ve been privileged to help grieving people for over twenty-five years, but I still learn something new from each person going through their own individual grief experience. A special thanks to all of my dear friends who have attended New Hope Center for Grief Support groups, workshops, and on-going groups. Living the grief process has made you the “real” experts and teachers in this field.

I also want to thank the individual supporters, churches, funeral homes and private businesses that sponsor our workshops and on-going groups. And, a very

special thanks to all of our many volunteers, facilitator's and workshop speakers.

God has placed a special anointing on this ministry. Thank you to our "Team Leader," God, for opening the doors for us to minister to those who have experienced the death of a loved one.

A note from Linda:

My first thank you is to Cathy Clough. The information that I learned in my eight week From Grief to New Hope workshop at my church, shortly after Donald died, positively changed the direction of my healing and my life. I was also able to use this same information to help my children heal. Thank you for taking the "leap of faith" and founding New Hope Center for Grief Support. I am forever grateful.

I would also like to thank Nancy Stoner. I have learned so much from you while co-facilitating From Grief to New Hope support groups over the last eight years. Your knowledge and wisdom are woven into every written word on each page of this book. You are a gifted teacher, mentor and my very special friend.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank my dear friend, Mary Hayek. Shortly after my first husband Donald died, Mary showed up in my life and took me by the hand. As she walked the path of grief with me, she taught me everything that she had learned while "living" through the grief process herself after the death of her husband, Tom. Mary also explained to me that it was my responsibility and my duty to take someone else that is grieving by the hand and walk the path with them...and soon after planting that seed in my heart, the idea for this book was born. Thank you, Mary.

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INTRODUCTION: UNDERSTANDING “THE GRIEF PROCESS”

What is happening to me? What happens next? Information is the remedy for eliminating the uneasiness that comes with not knowing what the future holds and the fear that many times clings to a griever’s heart, mind, and soul after experiencing the death of a close loved one. The grief process, like any other process in life, can be learned. The grief process is a journey.

We have found it helpful to visualize the grief journey as a path or road that we follow. Similar to any other path or road, this one has twists, turns, bumps, pitfalls, and potholes which need to be navigated. As a result of all the twists, turns, bumps, pitfalls, and potholes, we sometimes feel as if we have taken two steps forward followed by what seems like three enormous steps backward. From experience, we also know that no path or road is exactly the same. And just like any other path or road, this one

has a destination. The destination in this case is healing, acceptance, and new beginnings.

It was not your choice to travel down the path of grief. But you do have a choice in how you respond to this challenge. Choose healing. Allow the information in this book to guide you as you navigate the path of grief. In the beginning, this means just putting one foot in front of the other, getting through the day, and if you have children, remembering to feed both them and yourself.

The following is an overview of the different phases of grief that you will cycle through (sometimes more than once, and many times phases overlap) as you heal. It may be helpful to look at these phases as road markers along the path of grief. Remember, too: the choices that you make as you journey along this path will determine the direction that you take and the outcome.

THE PATH OF GRIEF

Numbness

Many of us remember watching President Kennedy's wife, Jackie Kennedy (Onassis) on television after the president was assassinated. During her husband's funeral, she maintained a stoic, almost "too together" appearance. She was numb and in shock. As someone in one New Hope Center for Grief support group once said, "Numb is good." If the death of a loved one was sudden and unexpected, the first thoughts, whether verbalized or not verbalized, are usually, "No this can't be true—not him/her!" This usually leads

to numbness—the time when you can put on a front and get through the early days and the funeral. You haven't yet begun to deal with the reality of the loss. Did it really happen?

What you can do: Be thankful for the numbness. Since the numbness is short-lived, allow people who offer you support and comfort to be there for you. You may not feel the need for them now, but you will, and you'll want them to be available.

Pain

It happened and it hurts. You realize it but can't believe it yet. The tears start coming, and you wonder if you'll ever be able to function normally again. There is an ache in your chest that you just can't seem to get rid of. You welcome sleep, since this is the only time you're not in pain. This is a time when you may want to stay in bed and pull the covers over your head. What's the point in getting up if he/she is not there? Some people choose to run during this time and keep busy, busy, busy, believing that if they are busy, they won't have to feel the pain as much.

What you can do: Allow yourself to feel the pain even though it hurts. When you begin to think about the person who died, think the thoughts completely through even though doing so may cause you to cry. Remember, tears are healing. Plan something that will *make you* get up in the morning. Try to find a balance between staying at home and getting out so that you can allow yourself time to grieve while still getting out among people. If you choose

to be on the go all the time, you won't be able to take the time to grieve. The grief will eventually catch you, so you might as well deal with it now while the world expects you to be grieving.

Disorientation

You may find yourself losing your temper at unusual times and places. You may feel restless and find yourself pacing, not knowing whether you're coming or going. You may start things you cannot finish, misplace things you cannot find. You may feel as if you are losing your mind. This can cause frustration, and you don't know where to turn.

What you can do: Get involved in a grief support group. There are two major benefits for participating in grief support groups. First, it will help you normalize your grief responses so that you will realize you are not, in fact, losing your mind—you're grieving! Secondly, you will meet others who understand and who will allow you to grieve and act a little crazy sometimes. Your family and other friends who haven't "been there" may not understand. Find ways to work through the frustrations you are feeling. For example, exercise is a good stress releaser. Take care of yourself.

Realization

It hits you now. The person who died is never coming back and the finality of death becomes very clear. You may feel that life is not worth living. How can you possibly go on without that person in your life? You may feel that there is no future for you. How could there be when the person you loved so deeply is gone, never to return? During this time, you may feel intense anger and find yourself lashing out at people for no apparent reason. You may feel strong feelings of guilt, recognized by using terms such as “If only” or “I should have” a lot when referring to the deceased person. You may find that you begin self-blaming, and because of this feeling, become angry at yourself, even hating yourself and feeling as if you don’t deserve a future.

What you can do: It is important to tell yourself that all of these feelings are normal; by completing the grief process you will get to a place where you will choose to go on and make a new life and future. Many people can’t imagine this at the time, but you have to hold on to that fact. During this time, we need to deal with our intense emotions—the anger, the guilt, the lack of self-worth. Talking about these feelings, dealing with them completely, and eventually letting them go should be our goal.

Readjustment

You’ve come to a place where you realize that you can go on and begin the process of making a new life for yourself. You begin to smile again, sometimes feeling guilty when

you do. You've been able to let go of the self-blame and the anger and have taken steps to begin anew, striving to find a "New Normal." This is the time many people feel a need to find meaning in the death and some begin their search with a new or renewed relationship with God. You begin to think realistically about the person who died and realize that you will always miss the person and remember him/her with love, but you can and will make a life without that person. You have to. You may feel surges of guilt when you think those thoughts, but that's normal, too.

What you can do: Begin to set some goals. Choose to refuse to take back the anger and the guilt feelings associated with your grief. Think positive thoughts. Begin to plan for a future. Make some changes in your life. Look at yourself—your inner and outer self and make any improvements you can which will help you feel better about yourself and prepare you for this new life. This would be a good time to seek God's guidance and allow him to help you.

Reestablishment

You have re-entered the world once again. You will never be the same—you are forever changed. But, life is worth living again. This is the time when you'll choose to place the person who died and the memories associated with that person in a special place in your heart—a place where you can find him/her whenever you choose to. You will choose to establish new, close relationships, maybe even reestablish relationships with people you moved away from in your early grief period.

What you can do: Act on the goals you've set. Use the tremendous loss you have experienced to help others. Make some positive changes in your life. Allow yourself to be happy and content and at peace with where you have been and where you are going.

Grief Work Is Hard Work

In his book *The Developing Mind*, author Daniel Siegel explains how hard your body and mind are working:

In the case of the death of a loved one, the mind is forced to alter the structure of its internal working models to adjust to the painful reality that you can no longer seek proximity and gain comfort from your loved one. Every part of your body and mind are adjusting to accepting the reality of the death. You are working through the pain of grief, adjusting to an environment in which the deceased person is missing, emotionally relocating the deceased person, all with the long-range goal of somehow moving on with your life.¹

The Five Needs of Every Griever

Grief expert Victoria Alexander identified the first three needs of every griever: “finding the words of an unimaginable loss, speaking them out loud, and knowing that they have been heard.”² These three elements are critical for healing, but there are two more needs that all grievers

share. Each griever needs to learn about the grief process. Each griever also needs to do the work of grief—his or her personal grief work.³

Please speak the following words aloud. I need to:

Put words to my feelings of grief

Speak those words aloud

Know that I have been heard

Learn about the grief process

Do my personal grief work

The Payoff Is Healing

Grief work is probably the hardest work you will ever do. The payoff is healing. Healing does not mean forgetting your loved one. Healing does not mean that you need to stop loving your loved one either or that you no longer miss your loved one.

Doing the work of grief allows you to return to a place of wholeness and normal functioning again. Helping you navigate your journey down the path of grief is our hearts' desire. We are holding out our hands to you. Grab on! We will walk side-by-side with you as you journey along the path.

Sincerely,

Cathy and Linda

THANK GOD FOR NUMB

FINDING THE WORDS I NEED

Before them the earth shakes, the sky trembles, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine.

(Joel 2:10, Compton's Interactive NIV)

This verse refers to an astounding invasion of locusts that went on for days. It has been described as a “living deluge” that seemed like it was never going to end. The locusts destroyed everything in their path. Sounds a lot like the invasion and impact of grief—don't you think?

You felt the deluge of grief rip through your body, mind, heart, and soul with a crushing and lacerating raw energy and pain. Your entire being shook and vibrated from the impact. You felt your heart

tremble and break into a million pieces. Emotions that were once comfortable together exploded into uncomfortable, painful chaos. The veil of grief darkened the world, the sun, and moon. The stars now appear to no longer shine. And the pain feels like it truly is N-E-V-E-R going to end.

Even though this is a fairly accurate description of what the impact of grief feels like, death teaches that there is not one word or group of words in any language that even comes close to describing what the lacerating sting of death and the pain of grief truly feel like. However, what we need to remember is that words are still helpful “healing tools.” It’s through the use of words that we process, comprehend, assimilate, and slowly make sense out of what has happened not only to our loved one or loved ones, *but to us!* Putting words to our feelings enables each of us to name, claim, and sort out what we are feeling. The problem for many of us is this: the death related numbness that we experience physically and emotionally after a death, many times impacts our ability to come up with words that are descriptive of what we are feeling. You are not alone if you feel as if your brain has been emptied of all words.

This numbness, which impacts each griever, is actually a gift of protection—compliments of God. He designed us with this feature because we need to be insulated from the pain after the death of a loved one. In fact, the impact of the loss without the benefits of emotional numbness would probably overwhelm most of us. Eventually, the numbness begins to melt away and we miss it.

Even if you are not having a problem finding words, this exercise will provide you with even more expressive “healing

tools.” Find yourself on the following list.³ Check off the words that describe what you are feeling. Claim each word by speaking it aloud. Sometimes it is helpful to write each word down on paper, too.

WORDS THAT DESCRIBE GRIEF:

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|-------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | AFFLICTION | <input type="checkbox"/> | MOURNING |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | AGONY | <input type="checkbox"/> | PAIN |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | ANGUISH | <input type="checkbox"/> | REGRET |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | BEREAVEMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> | REMORSE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | BURDEN | <input type="checkbox"/> | SADNESS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | DEJECTION | <input type="checkbox"/> | SORROW |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | DESOLATION | <input type="checkbox"/> | SUFFERING |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | DISTRESS | <input type="checkbox"/> | TRAGEDY |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | GRIEVANCE | <input type="checkbox"/> | TRIAL |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | HEARTACHE | <input type="checkbox"/> | TRIBULATION |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | HEARTBREAK | <input type="checkbox"/> | TROUBLE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | MISERY | <input type="checkbox"/> | WOE |

A definition of grief: *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* says that grief is the “deep and poignant distress caused by or as if by bereavement, sorrow.” It goes on to state that sorrow means “deep distress, sadness, or regret especially for the loss of something or someone loved.”⁴

Grief, my friend, is the expected, *normal* reaction to each loss that we experience during our lifetime. We all experience loss of youth and all the different losses that come with aging. Some of us experience loss of health. Sometimes we experience loss of employment or sadly a divorce. Many times, we experience multiple losses in a short period of time, complicating grief. We need to grieve each loss that we experience.

A Gem of Hope:

The sun, moon and stars will eventually shine again for you. Cling to this promise as you find healing words that propel you forward, one baby step at a time, along the path of grief.

The Destination Is Healing: Action Step

Pick out words from the list that describe and express what you are feeling. Write the words down. Speak the words aloud.