BACK TO LIFE!
YOUR PERSONAL GUIDEBOOK TO GRIEF RECOVERY

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INTRODUCTION- YOU WILL SURVIVE!

"The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step"
~ Chinese Proverb

"BACK TO LIFE"
Your Personal Guidebook to Grief Recovery

Welcome, Tenderheart,
to your grief recovery guide.

Since you are here, chances are you have recently experienced a tragic, grievous loss in your life... the loss of a beloved one. For that, I extend my deepest sympathies. I am so very sorry for your loss.

I know that I can never know the depths or quality of your pain, as it is your own personal journey, unlike any other. You will never forget this great tragedy, or your lost one, nor should you.

Right now you might be thinking, this is unbearable! How can I survive it? Rest assured
that you will survive, the grief process will see to that.

This guidebook came about because of my own experiences with grief, and my quest to find my own way through the dark forest known as bereavement. Keep in mind as you work through the guide that things will eventually get better, and though you will never return to the innocent, untouched state you were in before this happened to you, you can find your way to peace, acceptance, and a renewed appreciation for your own life. Be patient with yourself, and the healing will come.

HOW TO USE THE GUIDE

The Grief Guidebook consists of 19 "steps" or "lessons", each addressing a unique aspect of bereavement or providing a new coping method for you. Included also are some special techniques to use for getting "unstuck" in your grief late in bereavement.

Although there is no real "timetable" for grief, professionals agree that most seriously bereaved people take between 1 to 2 years to complete most of their "griefwork" and return to some semblance of an improved life and resolution of their grief.

So, ideally, you would receive this guide at the beginning and read and follow one chapter per month. But life is not that neatly ordered, and you may not discover "Back To Life" until you have been grieving much longer, even as long as a year. So read it as you need it. It is organized into three general sections, which you should try to stick to:

1. Early stages of grief- the first few months.
2. Dealing with the long haul- the first 12-18 months.
3. Acceptance and resolution- at 12-24 months or more.

It is not advisable for you to try to 'hurry up' the grief process. In other words, don't go to Step 16, "Box Up the Grief" when you are still in the throes of early bereavement.

If by providing this guide, I have lightened your load in the tiniest way or helped you hold on to hope during your darkest days, then my work is done.

My wish is that this Grief Guidebook informs, comforts, and shows you the way...
Back to Life.

~Jennie Wright, RN, GC-C, Certified Grief Counselor

[Ed. Note: The large font for this guidebook was intentionally selected. Bereaved people are often elderly. We wanted to make this book accessible and easy to read... for everyone.]
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“While grief is fresh, every attempt to divert only irritates. You must wait till it be digested, and then amusement will dissipate the remains of it.”
~Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)

IN THE BEGINNING
I. Your pain
II. Signs & symptoms of grief
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I. YOUR PAIN
Nothing could have prepared you for this! The raw pain, the frayed nerve endings, the sense of unreality. Bereavement shoves you into a surreal new world, issues you membership in an elite club, a brotherhood of wounded souls. Not that membership is ever desired!

You may wonder in the early days just exactly how you are going to survive this devastating blow. The answer? By breathing. That's all you need to know in the beginning... just keep on breathing and some time will pass, and you will survive, day-by-day. The process will take care of the rest.

Grief takes time, and we each take our own needed amount of it. There is no timetable, and contrary to what you may have believed before, there is no neat orderly progression through the "stages of grief".

That being said, I do want you to know that grief is a process, and there is only one way to make it through that process... directly. You cannot avoid grief, or go around it. You live through it and it eventually stops. Directly through the hell known as grief is the most direct
route to peaceful acceptance... and back to life.

You may be tempted in the beginning to avoid the pain whatever way you can... drugs, alcohol, overeating, excessive diversions. Drugs and alcohol may numb the pain temporarily, but this short-term relief puts you at grave risk for continued substance abuse. And the reality is, self medication prevents the healthy resolution of grief. It may help you escape for a short while, but it impairs the bereavement process overall.

Grief is painful... but it's supposed to be! Dealing with the pain of grief directly, and naturally, is the best way to resolve it.

*** Are you using short-term fixes or escapes to deal with your grief?
   * Alcohol or drugs
   * Excessive reading or TV watching
   * Overeating
   * Excessive shopping
   * Excessive exercise
   * Working too much

*** Admit it to yourself and commit to ridding yourself of these destructive excessive habits which sabotage the normal grief process. They make things more difficult in the long run.

II. Signs & Symptoms of Grief

In the beginning, bereavement can subject you to a bewildering array of symptoms. Some of them may be really scary, cause high anxiety, and even cause you to doubt your own sanity! It's a wonder you don't "lose it" permanently, given the trauma to your psyche this tragic event has caused. Just know that most anything you experience is a normal occurrence during grief. No, you are not going crazy... just grieving.

You may feel helpless, and wonder if you can survive alone without your loved one. Just remember that you managed okay before he or she entered your life, and, although it's not going to be easy, you will manage. You may feel overwhelmed at first, but this will pass. Hang in there.

Of course, you will have periods of intense sadness. It's okay to cry at these times, encouraged, even. Crying does release some of the pent-up emotions of grief. It's okay to cry alone sometimes, but it will help you more to find someone who will let you cry in front of them, and offer you support when it happens.

This is not a time to worry about the effects of your emotional outpouring on others. Don't worry that it might be undignified, or embarrassing, or inappropriate. Crying is a satisfying release and a direct route through bereavement. Although you might not want to break down at your son's Little League game, in the arms of a trusted friend, let it all out... it is not a sign of weakness, but of wisdom.

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Get ready for the ultimate emotional roller-coaster ride of your life! As long as your grief is "dynamic", always changing, moving, unpredictable, and fluid, it is progressing normally. Grief is a moving, growing, breathing thing, whose main purpose, it seems, is to keep you off balance. Just when you think you have reached and conquered a "stage" of grief, your pain comes back 10-fold to smack you down.

Believe it or not, that's okay. It's only when you get stuck, when your grief stagnates and stalls out... when you go through weeks and months where you don't feel you are progressing; that's when things have gone awry... I have a method that may help you get "unstuck", in Step 18, but that comes later on in this guidebook.

In the meantime, hang on for the ride of your life!

*** Have you experienced some of these signs or symptoms?

* Exhaustion or restlessness_____________
* Body aches and pains_____________
* Insomnia or over-sleeping_____________
* Appetite disturbances_____________
* Headaches_____________
* Anxiety-related chest pressure or shortness of breath_____________
* Spiritual or religious doubts_____________
* Relief (and guilt)_____________
* Helplessness_____________
* Forgetfulness, unable to concentrate_____________
* Irritable, short tempered_____________
* Can't remember things about your lost one_____________
* Afraid you will forget him or her_____________
* Imagining that you hear, feel, smell your beloved, or see her in a crowd_____________
* Carrying around a memento of him or her_____________
* Feeling that he or she "is with you" or "talks to you" sometimes_____________
* Obsessed with thoughts of your dear one_____________
* Vivid dreams of him or her, or dreaming they are still alive_____________

Don't panic! These are all normal reactions during grief!

III. Take care of your body

In the beginning, you may be so preoccupied with your grief and pain that you neglect the basic activities of daily living. You may have to remind yourself to bathe, do the laundry, eat and even command yourself to go to bed at night. It will get better as time goes on. You may have to force yourself to eat in the beginning, but it is important that you do take care of that
body. You might not really care right now, but you will need it later.

Get some exercise, even a short walk in the evening will help clear your mind and stave off depression. Fill the kitchen with healthy foods. Cheeses, yogurt, cereals, fruits and salads will be fairly easy for you to tolerate and provide some good nutrition. Grief expends a lot of energy. You will need fuel. Taking care of your health will help to ease you through the grief.

Taking care of your basic hygiene and household chores is important to help you maintain your dignity. It will not be easy at first. Nothing seems important compared to the death of your loved one. But it is important that you keep on with your daily routine, keep yourself and your environment clean, and take care of your body. These tasks will provide some much needed structure to your day. And it gives you something you can actually have control over!

Day-to-day life will get easier, you can count on it. You will survive. Give yourself permission to live! You will not die too!

IV. Accepting the Reality of the Death

On the surface, this section might seem unnecessary to you. You know only too well that your beloved is dead, right? Yet you need to do a little soul searching here. Accepting the reality of a loss needs to occur not only intellectually, but on an emotional level, as well. You may waver between rational acceptance and irrational, angry denial, deep inside. How can he possibly be dead???

It takes time to come to a place of complete acceptance of the reality of the loss. It's easier on your heart to tell yourself that she is just away on a trip, or back in the hospital. Your mind accepts the fact of the death long before your emotions allow it. You wake up in the morning and reach over to see if your lost one is there. You may pick up the phone to share a thought with your missing loved one. It will take time for your heart to finally accept the finality of the death and give this up.

There are two rituals that can help you fully accept the finality of the death. One is the funeral. This traditional ceremony actually serves a practical purpose. If you see the body, it helps hasten acceptance of the death.

But if you were not able to experience the funeral, then give some serious thought to visiting the gravesite or where the remains are being kept or were scattered. This is a personal decision, and not an easy one. Just know that this ritual can help you come to a better realization that your loved one is indeed gone, and will not return. A hard but necessary task of mourning.

Do you feel like you have fully accepted the death on an intellectual and emotional level?

Have you visited the site where your loved one's remains reside?________________
Do you feel like this would help you better come to terms with your loss?

________________________
CHAPTER 2- TELL YOUR STORY

“One often calms one's grief by recounting it.”
~Pierre Corneille, (1606-1684)

In the beginning of grief comes storytelling. It is traditional, expected, and natural. With the gathering of friends and family following the tragedy, the story is told... over and over again. It serves a useful purpose. In the beginning, storytelling releases raw energy, confirms the reality of the loss, and elicits needed sympathy and support from fellow mourners.

You may need to go over and over all the details in your mind, review many times the events surrounding the loss, before you can become fully aware that it has indeed happened. The tiniest details are important, so hold on to them and share them.

Later on in your grief, you will find yourself retelling your story of loss again to anyone who will listen. Storytelling helps you to make sense of things, helps you cope with the gaping void left by the loss, helps you find a new normal for yourself, and ultimately, helps you to move on. Storytelling is a helpful thing.

It is important that you tell your story. Find someone who will listen. If not a trusted friend, then a support group, and tell your story, in all its details:

*Where did the death occur?_____________________________
*What happened?_____________________________________
*How did you find out about the death? Who told you?________________
*What happened at the funeral? What was said in the memoriam?_______________
*Are you angry?_______________________________________
*Do you feel relieved (or guilty)?__________________________
*Why do you think this happened?__________________________

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It may also help you very much to write your story down. Get a bound journaling book at an office supply store, and start a journal. Tell your story... in all it's detail.

Express your grief and pain. Expose your anger and guilt. Detail your overwhelming sense of the unfair. Why did this horrible thing happen? Why to you? Experience your grief fully through the written word. Open your soul and write it all down. Writing is a wonderful outlet and it will help you feel better. Use your journal often.

You may wish to keep your words and thoughts private, for your eyes only. But some people find comfort in letting others know about their great loss. Our website, Recover-from-grief.com, also sponsors an exclusive Grief Club and forum where you can tell your story to other grieving souls. You do not have to use real names or sign it, either. Letting it all out and telling the whole world what has happened to you can provide a unique satisfaction and comfort.

The Grief Forum is very active and most posts receive multiple comments, suggestions and support from others. There is a private contact exchange service if you want to reach out to someone who you would like to connect with. It has become a kind of online grief support group.

Read all about our it here: www.recover-from-grief.com/words-of-sorrow.html

"When we tell our stories to one another, we, at one and the same time, find the meaning of our lives and we are healed from our isolation and loneliness... We do not know who we are until we hear ourselves speaking the drama of our lives to someone we trust to listen with an open mind and heart."

~Sam Keen
“To spare oneself from grief at all cost can be achieved only at the price of total detachment, which excludes the ability to experience happiness”
~Erich Fromm (1900-1980)

In the beginning stages of grief, it is important not to suppress it. Unfortunately, you must experience the excruciating pain and depths of despair in order to process grief properly, and make it through in one piece.

There is no getting around this. Efforts to bury, deny or avoid grief only postpone the inevitable. If you don't meet your grief head-on, it will come back to haunt you later in life. Unresolved grief can manifest itself through physical symptoms or psychological problems. So... with bereavement, sooner is better than later.

During your Internet travels, you may have come across some offers, e-books or phone counseling, offering a quick fix or easy way out of your misery. Well, I am sorry to tell you that there is no easy way out of grief, and anyone who tells you there is, is doing you a grave disservice. I would have to say they are probably taking advantage of your pain and vulnerable state of mind!

No one experiences the same amount or intensity or duration of pain in their grief. But severe raw pain is universal to all major bereavements. And even in today's "enlightened" society, giving way to grief can be seen as weak, unhealthy or morbid. This can prompt friends to try to distract you from your mourning. Well-wishers can actually make you feel wrong or embarrassed for your expressions of grief and sorrow, and you may in turn try to stop it in yourself.

You can short-circuit this task, the working through of pain, by cutting off your feelings or denying the pain. Thought-stopping procedures are not helpful in bereavement, and I say
again to you: do not avoid or deny the pain, especially in the beginning.

GUIDED IMAGERY

One effective method to express your full range of emotions is through guided imagery. This exercise helps you get in touch with your feelings about the loss in a powerful way.

Here's how to do it:
* Sit in a chair, close your eyes, and imagine that your lost loved one is there with you.
* Use present time, and address him or her directly.
* Talk directly to him or her, and say what you need to.

Some things that you might want to tell them:
* The thing I miss most about you is_________________________________
* I don't miss your___________________________________________
* I'm sorry I didn't___________________________________________
* I am sad that we didn't get to________________________________
* Please forgive me for_____________________________________

This technique encourages a full expression of thoughts and feelings, including regrets, disappointments, and guilty feelings.

INDULGE YOUR GRIEF

This is another exercise in which you can give full vent to all your powerful emotions, and get in touch with your deepest pain. Don't do this every night, maybe just a few times in the beginning of your bereavement:

* Bring together a collection of mementos and other reminders of your lost beloved.
* Examples would be a photo of him or her, a CD player with his favorite music, his cologne, a favorite old shirt, a piece of jewelry or a toy.
* Ensure that you will not be disturbed, and then lay down in bed and surround yourself with his or her memorabilia. Light a candle.
* Allow yourself to get in touch with his or her essence and indulge your grief fully.
* Pray, meditate or just think about your lost one.
* Cry if you feel like it.
* After 15-20 minutes, get up and move to another room, put away the mementos. Pull yourself back together.
CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS OF GRIEF

The written, musical or visual arts can also help you to experience and express your deepest feelings about the loss. Keeping a journal of your thoughts or writing poetry puts you in touch with your soul and can provide significant comfort over the long haul. If you play a musical instrument, by all means resort to this creative outlet often. Share your own grief poetry with the world in our website:


Read more about using music and/or poetry to express and experience grief fully here:


Creating pictures that reflect your inner feelings can also be helpful. It doesn't matter how "good" you are with pencil, pen or paints. The value is in the doing, not in the finished product. Play some comforting music while you draw or paint, and let your pain and emotions out through this creative outlet. The visual arts are less susceptible to defensive distortions than words are. They involve a different part of the brain and can be very effective in promoting the grief process.

Explore other methods of creative grieving techniques here:

GRAB SOME MARKING PENS OR COLORED PENCILS AND DRAW A PICTURE OF YOUR WOUNDED HEART:
CHAPTER 4- FORGIVE THEM FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY SAY...
(DID SHE REALLY SAY THAT?)

“Every one can master a grief but he that has it”
~William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

You might just be tempted to SCREAM if one more person tells you, "I know how you feel". Right?

**NO ONE KNOWS HOW YOU FEEL!**

Statements made to you by "well-wishers" often convey an underlying disapproval of your grief and sadness, and may fill you with conflicting emotions and even anger.

*Platitude, n.= "Cliche, trite expression". You have heard many platitudes since your bereavement began. Most people are quite uncomfortable when faced with a heavily bereaved person. They literally don't know what to say to you. So they dispense platitudes, or tired expressions of sympathy, in a misguided attempt to make you feel better. It does the opposite.*

It never ceases to amaze me the blundering stupidity of things said to tender souls grieving a terrible loss. Here's a sampling of what you can expect (if you haven't already heard them). It might be hard for you to believe some of them, but each one of these has actually been reported:

**"You're young, you can have more children"."**
"Life is for the living".  
"Keep a stiff upper lip".  
"He wouldn't want you to be so sad".  
"Be a brave little boy" or "You'll have to be the man of the house now" (to a child!)  
"This will soon end".  
"You are standing up well".  
"This will all be over in a year".  
"You'll be fine", or "You'll be okay".  
"At least you didn't bring her home from the hospital" (newborn).  
"I know how you feel" or "I understand".  
"Get a hold of yourself".  
"You can't fall apart".  
"Pull yourself up by your bootstraps".  
"Time heals all wounds".  
"At least he is not in pain anymore".  
"She's in a better place".  
"God needed another angel" or "It was God's will".  
"Things will be back to normal before you know it".  
"Don't cry... crying only upsets you".  
"You're strong enough to handle this".  
"It was meant to be".  
"There are other fish in the sea" or "You'll find someone else".  
"Isn't it time you got back to normal?"  
"What's done is done".  
"Be thankful you have other children".  
"This too shall pass".  
"She led a full life".  
"God never gives you more than you can handle".  
"Be grateful you had him for so long."  

And the worst are people who tell you about their Grandfather who died last spring. As if comparing tragedies could somehow comfort you!

What to do about all these platitudes?

*First, go through all the statements listed above, and circle each one that someone has "used" on you.  
*Then, write who said it down beside it  
*Then look at each one, and think about it. What exactly did Marion mean when she made that thoughtless statement? Did she really mean me harm?  
Was her intent to deepen my misery? Or was she just feeling awkward and innocently giving misguided and useless advice?

Unload any anger or resentment you might have about the inane things people say to you in your grief. You have enough baggage to carry on your journey.

**Forgive them, for they know not what they say...**
“Like fragile ice, anger passes away in time.”
~Ovid

I'm glad you didn't skip this section. You may feel that you're not angry about the death, but deep down inside, you really are. Virtually EVERY bereavement contains some element of anger. And for most grieving people, anger is a biggie, even if they don't realize it.

Even if you do recognize that you are angry, you may be confused as to why this should be ("She didn't choose to die, why should I be mad?")

The honest truth is that you carry with you some degree of anger that your loved one died and left you alone with such horrible pain. It really is their fault for dying! Also, you probably feel helpless in your grief. This makes you feel anxious and then angry at your own perceived inadequacies. ("I should be able to handle this!")

Anger is reasonable. It is expected and normal. It is a recognized stage of grief. Look for it in yourself, acknowledge and express it. If you fail to accept your pain and validate it, repressed anger can lead to complicated grief and even clinical depression.

Get in touch with your angry feelings now, or you may find yourself on an analyst's couch in a few years.

So take the time right now to identify your anger. Who or what are you angry at?

*The doctor for not saving him?
*Your spouse for allowing her to go to the dance?
*The drunk driver who caused the accident?
*Your friend at work who is telling you to pull yourself together?
*The financial mess you were left to deal with?
*God for allowing this to happen?
*All the happy people who haven't had a tragedy like this strike them?
*Yourself for not being in control of the situation?

If you think about it, there's plenty of anger inside you right now. Just know that this is perfectly understandable, and a normal part of grief. Everyone goes through it, so don't feel guilty for being mad! And forgive yourself for feeling angry at your lost loved one. What could you possibly be mad at them for?

*Angry that she left you behind, and in pain.
*Angry that he took away your future plans and dreams.
*Angry that she didn't go to the doctor sooner.
*Angry that he didn't lead a healthier lifestyle or he drank too much.
*Angry that she left behind a financial or legal mess for you to deal with.

It's really important to acknowledge that you are angry, and let yourself feel it without guilt. Don't deny it or pretend you're not angry when you really are. Don't let anyone else stop it or make you feel bad for it, or force you into forgiveness. It's okay to be angry with the whole wide world right now, including your lost beloved, for the tremendous tragedy that has been forced on you. It really isn't fair, and you are justified in feeling outraged at the injustice of it all!

For now, let the anger remain. Don't direct it on yourself, but direct it towards your loved one, which is where it belongs. It's okay to be angry with the person who died. It doesn't mean you love them any less, or that they were bad. Right now, directing your anger towards the deceased is helping you to survive emotionally. Over time, your anger will resolve. You may feel mad again from time to time, but over the long haul, the anger will eventually fade.

Don't let the anger consume you. Express it by words, or writing, or by drawing or painting. Let it out, direct it outward. Live with it for a while, then let it go.
“Make the most of your regrets; never smother your sorrow, but tend and cherish it till it comes to have a separate and integral interest. To regret deeply is to live afresh.”
~Henry David Thoreau

Guilt is another strong emotion that is almost always woven into the rich tapestry of bereavement. And, like anger, you might not even be aware that it is there!

Why would you suffer from guilt if you are well aware that you didn't actually cause the death?

There are two main things that may cause regret or guilt during bereavement:

* Guilt that you didn't do enough or do the right things to prevent the death or suffering in your loved one.
* Guilt that you didn't "finish business" with your loved one before they died.

First, you may feel guilty that something you did or didn't do contributed to the death or pain your loved one suffered. You may feel that you:

* Should have taken symptoms more seriously.
* Should have taken them to the doctor or hospital sooner.
* Should not have allowed the operation.
* Should have done more to alleviate their pain.
* Should have intervened or changed the medical care being given.
* Should not have allowed them to go to the event where the accident occurred.
* Should have done something that would have prevented the accident.
The list goes on and on... What ifs... Could haves... Should haves... If only you could turn back the clock! It's perfectly normal in your grief to have regrets or feel guilty about the death of your loved one. There is a remedy for this. Read on.

Secondly, you may feel guilty about "unfinished business" with your loved one. This can be simple, or quite a complicated issue. You may regret that you:

*Didn't get a chance to say goodbye.
*Weren't with them when they died.
*Didn't say "I love you" before you parted for the last time.
*Didn't forgive him or her for something they did.
*Didn't make up from an argument before they died.
*Never said things to them that you should have.
*Weren't good or kind enough to them.
*Had some negative feelings or judgments about him or her.
*Actually feel relieved that a long illness or conflicted relationship has ended in death.

Any of this sound familiar? What to do about all this regret and guilt? You have enough pain and devastation without adding to it with guilty feelings, so guilt must eventually be dealt with.

There are two steps you can take in dealing with guilt during your bereavement:
*Reality testing
*Forgiving yourself

The first step is to "reality test" your guilt. Most guilt is irrational, and doesn't hold up under reality testing. And this is how it's done:

First figure out exactly how you think you "wronged" your lost beloved. **Example:** "I should not have let her go to the party".

Next, try to figure out exactly how what you did caused the death. Did the fact that you let her go actually cause her death? No, it didn't. The reality is that the death occurred totally separate from your decision, and is unrelated.

The reality is that you did nothing wrong, nothing at all to cause the death. You have no logical reason to feel guilty. That's reality testing.

**Another example:** "I should have made him quit smoking years ago". Who's decision was it to keep on smoking, and who ultimately was the cause of the illness and death?

It was not your decision. You did not cause his death. His own decision to continue with an unhealthy habit did. *That's the reality of it.*
A third example: "I should have been watching him more closely" (in the case of the accidental death of a child).

Guess what? You may have been human, and had a lapse in your normal parental vigilance. But did you cause her to fall in the pool and drown? Did you place him in the street where cars posed a threat?

No, you did nothing malicious to cause the death. You never intended harm to come to your child! It was just an accident that happened, and you did not cause it.

*Once again, reality testing releases you from true guilt.*

---

**FORGIVENESS**

The second part of the release of regret and self-guilt is forgiveness. This is necessary when it becomes clear to you that you really did in some way cause the death or increase the pain/suffering of your loved one. The guilt is real to some degree.

In cases like this, you may become mired in a complicated grief, and may well need professional counseling in order to sort it all out and release the heavy burdens of your guilt. Just remember that no matter how responsible you may have been in causing the death, every life deserves to be salvaged. And you are still alive.

Whether you ultimately need psychotherapy or decide to "go it alone", the remedy for genuine guilt is **forgiveness**. When you are ready, ask for forgiveness from your lost loved one. Ask them to understand that you are only human and you have limitations. You did the best you could under the circumstances. There really was little you could have done differently without the benefit of a crystal ball.

Acknowledge the guilt, realize how unreasonable and non-productive it is, and then let it go.

**A word of warning here:** Don't ask for forgiveness either for yourself, or forgive your loved one, until you are truly ready for it. If you try to force it too early, the act of forgiveness will not be sincere, and the whole exercise will only increase your frustration. Give it plenty of time. When the time is right, you will be able to sincerely forgive yourself or others.

Note: If over time, you find your guilty feelings increasing rather than decreasing, you are obsessing about it, or you are just consumed with guilt, please seek out professional counseling. You will not be able to heal from this on your own.
MAKE A PACT RIGHT NOW TO QUIT BLAMING YOURSELF FOR A DEATH YOU DID NOT CAUSE

NOTES, THOUGHTS, IDEAS & PRAYERS:
CHAPTER 7- CELEBRATE A LIFE

"And can it be that in a world so full and busy the loss of one creature makes a void so wide and deep that nothing but the width and depth of eternity can fill it up!"
~Charles Dickens (1812-1870)

In the earlier stages of your grief, you will find much comfort in creating a memorial to your lost loved one.

One of the first and easiest ways for you to celebrate the lost life is to write your own eulogy to them. If you want to, you can read this written testament out loud at the funeral or a later memorial service. Or you can keep it private, for your eyes only. But write it, you should. Celebrate his or her life with words. Tell everything you loved about them, all the quirks and little things you will miss. You can also include things that bothered you about your beloved, things you will not miss.

Just remember, though, this is a eulogy, to memorialize the life they lived, honor their memory, and commemorate their passing. Let the writing be a labor of love, an outpouring of your heart and soul. Once it's all out, you will know whether you want to share it or not.

Do give consideration to sharing your eulogy with others. You may feel the need to connect with others at our Grief Forum (http://www.recover-from-grief.com/words-of-sorrow.html). Or post a beautiful online memorial page at Theirspace (http://www.recover-from-grief.com/create-a-memorial-website.html)

Another way to commemorate your loss is by creation of a memorial space in your home. You will probably feel the need to create an "altar" of sorts, to remember and honor him or her. Most people do this automatically. This is a normal and natural instinct, and should be encouraged.

Your “altar” could be a side table set up to hold photos, mementos, toys or possessions, candles, flowers, anything you want to include. Many Latin American countries do this formally, creating "Ofrendas" to honor their dead. You may want to explore this comforting traditional ritual. For more details about Ofrendas, visit www.recover-from-grief.com/memory-boxes.html.

One activity that would involve the whole family is to create a memory book or scrapbook of your beloved. Include family stories, lots of photos, memorabilia such as awards, service pins, souvenirs of travel. Have family members write poems or drawings to include in the book. This is especially helpful for the children. The group activity of making the memory book can help a family reminisce, talk openly about the deceased, and lean on each other during the painful days of bereavement.

There are many comforting ways to memorialize your lost one, honor his life and mark his passing with appropriate ceremony. You might want to contact their place of business or school and contribute a memorial bench under a tree with a plaque of commemoration. Plant a "Tree of Life" in a special corner of your yard. Let the children help you pick it out, plant it and water it. Roadside memorials can be comforting to mourners who lost a life on the highway. Contact the highway department first, some towns actually help in this and provide "Drive Safely" signs that you can decorate.

It can be very therapeutic to plan and implement "just the right" memorial for your loved one. You may have not given this much thought, so I recommend that you devote some time and effort to this most worthy project. It will help you stay in touch and close to your lost beloved.
CHAPTER 8- AN ACADEMY AWARD PERFORMANCE

"He that conceals his grief finds no remedy for it" ~ Turkish proverb

In the beginning, soon after word of the tragedy spreads to your family and friends, the gathering commences. The ritual of the funeral provides support for you. Your family allows you to ventilate, provides a shoulder for you to cry on. Early in your bereavement, outsiders understand and expect you to express your grief.

As time goes on, your support system dissipates, as friends and family drift back home, and back to their lives. You may feel very much alone with your grief at this point. And you may also notice something curious. Those neighbors and coworkers who were so understanding in the beginning are starting to get uncomfortable with your grief.

They don't know what to say to you now, and although they may not expect you to be through grieving, it makes them uncomfortable, and they secretly wish you would "get over it", for their own comfort. Even some of your family members may be eager to get over the loss and pain and get back into their normal routine. Adult children may urge their mother to stop mourning, because "Dad wouldn't want you to be sad".

This is wrong, misguided advice that is given not to help Mom, but to help life return to normal for the children. Don't let anyone tell you how to grieve, or for how long. Everyone grieves in their own way, and they need to take as long as they need to process the loss and recover. It cannot be done on someone else’s timetable.

This means you, too. The uncomfortable reactions of others when you try to express your grief quickly teaches you to "act recovered" in an attempt to make them more comfortable and to regain their approval.
So what do you do? You tell them "I'm fine".

**No, you're not!** Quit doing that, giving an "Academy Award" performance just to cater to the feelings of others. It is not helpful. Surround yourself instead with people who "get it" and will allow you to tell your story of grief over and over or cry when you need to, without judging you or giving unsolicited and ignorant advice.

It is not time for you to "get on with your life" until you are good and ready. And don't act otherwise.

Nope, you're not gonna win an Oscar for acting like you're fine...
When someone dies, they usually become "larger than life" in the memories of the survivors. There is a tendency to glorify the deceased; he was a "saint". He was the best father or husband that ever lived! No one could play the piano like him. He was kind and funny and good. Not an ill word about him to be heard!

You may find that in the beginning, you will probably do the same, remember just the good traits; idealize your lost loved one. And that's the way it should be, in the beginning. It serves a purpose. Later on, you will come to a more realistic memory of him or her, but for now, a largely positive feeling toward your lost loved one helps begin the healing process, and encourages fellow mourners to lend much needed sympathy and support.

If you had a very conflicted or traumatic relationship with the deceased, there is a chance that right now, you can only remember all the bad or negative things about him or her. No one is perfect, just as no one is all bad. It is important that you build a groundwork of at least some positive memories to help you cope. A true picture of how the relationship really was can come later.

If you haven't already done so in a eulogy or journal, take a private moment now to write on a clean piece of paper, or in your journal. List all the good things you can remember about your beloved:

* What do you miss about him or her?
* What did you like best about the way he or she looked?
* Endearing traits or habits.
* Special talents that you admired.
* Who was he, what was he like?
* What did you two enjoy doing together?
* In what way do you feel she was a special human being?
* In what way is the world better because he lived?
Over time, your sanitized remembrance of your loved one will start to normalize. All those memories of a perfect person are gradually replaced by more realistic memories of them, in all their humanness... quirks, bad habits and mistakes they made. Some anger and disappointment in them is normal. It does not mean you didn't love him enough. To the contrary, it means you really did care.

So, later in your grieving stages, not only is it safe to get in touch with some of the negatives, it is a healthy thing. Time then for another writing exercise. Sit down to some blank paper and try to be honest and realistic about your loved one:

* What don't you miss about him?
* How did she hurt or disappoint you?
* In what ways was he unfair to you?
* What bad habits did she have that you will not miss?
* What did he do that made you angry?
* Every relationship involves some sacrifice and compromise. In what way are you more free or unburdened because your loved one is gone? (It's okay to feel some measure of relief because of your loss! Just be honest with yourself, give voice to these heavy emotions, forgive yourself for feeling them, and let them go.)

A word of caution here. A conflicted relationship can lead to a complicated grief. If your relationship with the deceased involved emotional, physical or sexual abuse, or if drug or alcohol addiction impacted it, you may find it very hard to deal with the emotions of relief, guilt, anger and sadness. If you find that over time you are unable to come to terms with your loss because of these complicating factors, do seek out a professional experienced in grief counseling and get some help with it.

One day you will come to realize that you have started to remember some of the negative things about him or her. You will actually know that you are beginning to heal when you can recall a more balanced, objective memory of your lost one. Your grief will eventually resolve only if you mourn a human, not a saint. So in order to complete the grief process, you must eventually look closely and honestly at the whole relationship... the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly...
CHAPTER 10- UH OH, CHRISTMAS IS COMING...
(OR HER BIRTHDAY, OR THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH... OR...)

“Christmas is a bridge. We need bridges as the river of time flows past. Today's Christmas should mean creating happy hours for tomorrow and reliving those of yesterday.” ~ Gladys Tabor

Just ask anyone who has ever mourned the death of a loved one if there are any points in time that are harder than others, and they will tell you... the first birthday without them, the first Christmas, and the anniversary of the death. These milestones are notoriously tough during bereavement because they are a fresh and emotional reminder of the loss.

Be prepared for quite an intense reaction in yourself at these times, a huge wave of emotion. This is a normal part of grieving, and not a setback. Don't panic!

For many mourners, the holidays are toughest. The best way to deal with them is head-on. Planning, anticipating and thinking through Christmas beforehand can help quite a bit. Although you may dread the coming holidays, it probably won't be as bad as you think it will be. Just remember it won't go away, so it's best to just make plans for it. Talk it over with your family, and decide if you all want to celebrate the way you have in the past, or if a change in traditions might be the best approach.

Some ideas and strategies for the holidays:

* Simplify this year. Skip the Christmas cards, elaborate decorations, extensive shopping, and cooking for others. De-stress as much as possible.
* Start a new holiday tradition-- plan a trip to the beach or mountains instead of staying home.
* Scale down the Christmas day celebration to a few close friends and family.
* Delegate the chores-- let those offering to help do some cooking, gift shopping,
or run errands for you.
* Plan a special celebration in memory of your loved one, like a candle lighting or special prayer.
* Make sure to take time out alone for quiet reflection and a good cry.
* At the family gathering, set up a special memory table for your lost one.
  Encourage others to bring photos or mementos.
  Encourage them to write a memory on a piece of paper. Later read all the memories out loud to encourage reminiscing.
* Do not ignore or fail to acknowledge the terrible loss the family has endured.

The first birthday of your lost one without him can be very hard. All kinds of precious memories and sad feelings return. You can still celebrate the day if you want to. Go out to dinner with the family, and toast him or her with a "Happy Birthday". Enjoy cake and ice cream afterward. You will get through it.

Another critical time to beware of is the first anniversary of the death. This date may bring up grief so painful that you may even wonder if you have made any progress or recovery at all. You have. This is also a time for reflection, for you to take stock of how far you have actually come from those first horrible and confusing days of fresh bereavement.

There are some useful strategies you can use to help make the passing of the one-year milestone less traumatic. First, do not ignore the date, hoping it will just go away. It won't. Instead acknowledge it and plan a commemoration or celebration of his or her life:

* Tell other people in your life of the impending anniversary. They just might not remember, so remind them.
* Plan a ceremony for family and close friends, with a candle lighting and poetry reading or prayer.
* Do a balloon or dove release with your family.
* Visit the cemetery or site of the scattering of ashes. Take friends for support.
* Plan a special outing or dinner that you know your loved one would have enjoyed. Drink a toast to them. Plan to do it every year in their honor.
* Pick one of these ideas, or create your own special ritual to commemorate and give meaning to the death anniversary.

A particularly effective strategy for dealing with these emotionally charged dates is to remember that you will only have to go through the "firsts"; first birthday, first anniversary, first Christmas or first year since the death... once.

And often, the dread and apprehension turns out to be worse than the actual event itself. Once you have survived the "firsts", you will know that you are strong enough to go on. The "seconds" will be easier.
CHAPTER 11- SO WHAT'S TO LAUGH ABOUT?

"Through humor, you can soften some of the worst blows that life delivers. And once you find laughter, no matter how painful your situation might be, you can survive it."

~ Bill Cosby (Who lost his son Ennis to murder in 1997).

In the earlier stages of your grief, the world is a bleak and desolate place. Not only do you not smile, you don't really care if you ever laugh again.

You may see someone laughing at the grocery store and scream at them in your mind: "What are you laughing about? My husband just died last week!!"

Your grief is so all-encompassing that nothing else matters, and the world should come to a standstill because of the horrible tragedy which has occurred.

But as you will see, life goes on, and the world continues to turn, just as it always has.

You may feel that by laughing, you are somehow dishonoring or showing disrespect to your lost loved one. You may feel guilty that by smiling and laughing again, by having a renewed enjoyment of life, it means that you have stopped caring about the lost one and loving them.

Just know that it is not only possible, but necessary, to find some humor along with your enduring love for them. And though you may not be ready to hear it right now, somewhere
down the road, you'll remember a funny story from your lost one's life and it will feel good to remember it with laughter. Laughing together as a family in the face of hard times carries with it a love and support for each other. A sacred, trusted society of family love.

You will eventually come to find that humor has it's place in grief, and serves a very important function. It helps provide a release, a pressure valve to help your poor burdened psyche cope when things get too difficult to handle. When we become overwhelmed, humor can bring relief. It helps us to cope with our anxieties and takes our minds off our troubles. When you laugh (or cry) you are most definitely living "in the moment" and not in the past. Humor gives us a breather by diverting our attention, if only for a brief moment.

At the proper time in your bereavement, you will find yourself laughing again. I believe that your loved one would want you to have a renewed interest and enjoyment in life again. I believe that coming back to life is the best tribute or honor you could bestow on them. If they were alive, they would be laughing, wouldn't they?

So your task for this lesson... find something to laugh about! Promise yourself that once a week at least, you will do something fun. What did you enjoy doing in the past that brought a smile to your face? Start doing it again.

You might enjoy playing a board game with your family, or playing old-fashioned charades, or taking them out for bowling, skating, or a round of miniature golf.

One really easy way to a good belly laugh is to watch "America's Funniest Videos" or rent some good comedy DVDs. Everyone has different tastes, but you may enjoy some of these funny movies to get you started:

*Swept Away
*the Philadelphia Story
*Young Frankenstein
*Blazing Saddles
*Airplane
*MASH
*Tootsie
*Meet the Parents
*Austin Powers; The Spy who Shagged me.
*Some Like it Hot
*Ghostbusters
*Raising Arizona
*National Lampoon's Animal House
*Office Space
*Monty Python & the Holy Grail
*Pushin' Tin

Does all this sound unimportant and shallow to you in your grief? Then take time to find the supreme value in humor. It is life's natural antidepressant.
"Do not protect yourself from grief by a fence, but rather by your friends".
~Czech Proverb

Self-sufficiency and independence are normally seen as signs of strength, an admirable quality.

But not during grief! Bereavement is a time for surrender, a time to give it all up and depend on friends and family to keep you safe through the storm. You found out when your loved one died that you could not control everything. And in the early stages of grief, there is nothing more soothing or helpful than to give up trying to control things and to rely on other humans for aid.

Let go and receive all the love and support you need. Your true friends will be there for you. It's nature's way, or God's way, if you prefer to see it that way.

A quick reminder here: Do NOT bury the grief, push it away and try to carry on with your life. You may succeed, but the grief will come back to haunt you later in life. Better to get it over with now. Surrender to the grief, let it run it's course, and reach out for help from others as you endure.

ASK FOR SUPPORT

So where can you find this type of help? Start close to home, with your family and close
friends. Find a partner willing to listen. Someone who has also suffered intense emotional loss, possibly in your own family. There is someone in your life who has a big heart and sympathetic ear, who could lend you this special kind of support right now.

Take a moment right now to decide who you know that might be willing to do this for you: __________________________. And vow to talk to him or her soon. Explain that you really need to ventilate and would they be willing to listen?

Rely on your loved ones for other help, too. Now is the time to be selfish and ask for aid from your closest friends and family. What do you need help with? Anything and everything. Just ask. Take as much time off from work as you can and neglect your usual routine at first to allow the shock of bereavement to mellow a little bit. Ask for help with household tasks or babysitting chores, or maybe just a shoulder to cry on.

YOUR FAMILY WILL CHANGE

The death of a loved one can forever alter family dynamics. The highly-charged emotional issues can tear a family apart if anger, blame and guilt are allowed to flourish unchecked. Communicating with one another openly and honestly can go a long way towards helping your family heal. Hiding grief to try to protect each other is not healthy, and retards the grieving process. Everyone must take care, even in their darkest days, to be gentle and patient with one another.

Each family reacts to grief loss in a different way, and it will take time for your bereaved family to regain its balance. Roles and responsibilities are sure to change and it will take time for everyone to adjust to their new roles and the new family structure.

In complicated grief situations such as suicide, violence, AIDS, multiple deaths in an accident or the death of a child, professional counseling may well be needed to help the family survive and heal.

GRIEF SUPPORT GROUPS

Somewhere around 3-6 months after the disaster, you will notice a shift in your support system. All the friends who rallied to your side at the time of the disaster have gone, gotten back to their lives. You may find yourself pretty much a lone griever now. You may just be ready for a different kind of grief assistance... a local support group. Grief support groups can be one of the most powerful healing vehicles available to you. In reaching out for help from others in this type of setting, you end up helping others as well. And you will find that in helping others, you heal yourself.

It is such a relief to be with people who "get it"! Only those who have endured the painful misery of grief as you have can fully understand. They will know how to let you ventilate and tell your story. You'll find yourself in an elite club of wounded hearts. No one asked to be a
member, but most will be glad the club was there for them when they needed it.

Sure, you can pour your heart out in a journal and grieve by yourself in bed at night. It is important to take time out alone for some of your grieving. But over the long haul, it is not good to grieve alone. The best way to heal is to reach out to other humans. A sympathetic ear and warm shoulder helps in a way that solitude cannot. Reach out to others. Help and be helped in a local grief support group.

Where to find one? Look in the yellow pages under "Hospice". They will likely know of any groups in your area. Or try these support websites to locate a local group in your town:

**LOCAL (OFFLINE) GRIEF SUPPORT PROGRAMS**

**FOR GRIEVING A LOST CHILD:**

COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS- www.compassionatefriends.org
Find a local chapter of this organization which provides personal support for those who have lost a child. Seasoned grievers reach out to the newly bereaved, and both are helped to heal. Well established and popular.

BEREAVED PARENTS USA- www.bereavedparentsusa.org
Local support groups are moderated by volunteer bereaved parents in monthly meetings. Website also has informative articles and poems.

CANDLELIGHTERS- www.candle.org
Childhood cancer support groups. Local programs provide financial assistance and activities to families in need. The website has "Listserve", an online email support group.
"Why is it when we talk to God we are said to be praying, and when God talks to us, we're said to be schizophrenic?" ~Lily Tomlin

Many bereaved people report that their loss forced them into a serious crisis of faith. They found themselves questioning their most basic beliefs about life and spirituality.

The shocking loss of a loved one may well raise the following questions in your mind:

* Is the world a good place, or is it really evil?
* Am I being punished for something?
* If God is good, why did he allow this to happen?
* Is there a God, after all?
* Is there any sense or balance in the world or is it all random?
* Why did (s)he have to die?
* Am I worthy enough to keep on living?

The death of a loved one can shake the very foundation of your basic philosophical beliefs and fundamental life values. You may feel that you are left without direction. You may feel helpless and grope to regain some control over your life.

As a bereaved person, you may find yourself looking for meaning in the loss, trying to make some sense of it. This is especially true when the death was sudden, unexpected and
senseless. You may try to find a reason or lay unwarranted blame as to why this terrible tragedy occurred.

It is also very common for bereavement to cause you to question your religious or spiritual beliefs. Although this may be understandable and even expected, there is no easy answer to this problem. Spiritual, religious and philosophical beliefs are so individual, so unique to each soul, that it would be impossible for us to offer a generic solution to your dilemma.

Just know that your crisis of faith should fade in intensity as your grief does. You will eventually come to a belief system that works for you, just as you find a more comfortable place in your new life for your grief. You will emerge with a new-found respect for the fragility of life and the limits of control that you actually have over it.

Some people find much comfort in the beliefs and rituals of their church, while others have their faith shaken to the core. Anger at God is a typical and common response to the loss of a beloved person. Express the anger. It is not necessarily a bad thing, and it will fade with time if you are allowed to express it while it is hot.

**FIND INNER PEACE**

In order to cope with the emotional stresses of bereavement and the life changes it brings, you must learn how to relinquish control. You cannot control who lives or dies, and when and how such events occur. You do not have power over how other people choose to live their lives and interact with you, either.

The only thing you do have control over is your own reaction to these situations. When things seem bleak and hopeless, you can make your own inner peace. This is an important skill to learn for your own emotional survival.

When you are thick in the midst of the turmoil and desolation known as grieving, you might forget that there is a source of inner peace and strength deep inside you. Everyone has it, and the lucky ones learn to get in touch with it in times of need. Prioritize! You are going to get in touch with yours!

Get off by yourself and take the time to quiet your mind in the way that works best for you. Some people use meditation or yoga. Others pray to their God. Still others commune with nature or find peace in certain music that they love. Your inner core of strength will help you survive the storm. Visit your special inner place as often as you need to in order to revitalize yourself.

For a free and easy-to-follow guide to get you started on meditation (it's simple and quite refreshing), visit: [www.findlove-keeplove.com/learn-meditate.html](http://www.findlove-keeplove.com/learn-meditate.html)
PRAY FOR HELP

You may just try praying to your God for help. Your burden of grief may be so heavy that this is the only option left. Surrender to God, or simply pray to any higher being for help. Chances are very good that in giving up control, surrendering to whatever comes next, you may well find the comfort you seek.

All I can say about prayer is that it helped me climb out of a black hole. I had never been a very religious person before I lost my loved one. But in the depths of my misery, I felt like I had reached the bottom of my soul. There were no options left to me. None. So I prayed to a God who I wasn't even sure existed. I simply prayed for help. No one can ever take this secret resource, this wellspring of strength and peace, from you.

How to pray? However you please. Keep it simple and uncluttered. Simply ask and you will be blessed with help. It's that simple. That, I truly believe, is the reason and the purpose that all religious practices came to be.

Prayer worked for me. Although it did not magically take away all my pain, it helped me grope my way out of the darkness and back to life. I was never totally alone in my grief again.

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USE THIS PAGE TO DRAW OR MAKE NOTES ABOUT YOUR SPIRITUAL FEELINGS:

WHY NOT CREATE A SPECIAL PRAYER OR AFFIRMATION TO HELP YOU THROUGH HARD TIMES?
CHAPTER 14- A SILVER LINING?

“Clouds may come, but clouds must go, and they all have a silver lining. For behind each cloud, you know, the sun or moon is shining.”
~Author unknown

What good could possibly come from the death of a loved one?

In the beginning, you were totally devastated by your loss, and just the thought of searching for anything good from it was unthinkable.

But you may just be ready now for a little soul-searching; to help you find at least a tiny silver lining in your dark cloud of tragedy.

Do not misunderstand what I am saying here! I know that you would not have chosen to lose your loved one, and would have them back in a heartbeat if you could. All I am saying is that since it did happen, and the reality is that you have sustained a permanent loss, it will help you come to peace and closure by finding at least one good thing that happened because of the tragedy.

The most likely place to find this good is in yourself. Although you would not have chosen this route, bereavement forces change and growth onto everyone who experiences it. In the beginning, you may have felt yourself a weak, helpless victim. But as time goes on, these negative feelings usually give way to more positive images of yourself.

You will discover that you do carry on, complete necessary tasks, and learn new ways of coping with life without your loved one at your side.
You may have been very dependent on him or her for certain tasks or functions. And their death has forced you to learn new skills and take on more responsibilities that you never would have, had they lived.

So necessity has probably forced you to:

* Learn new skills like cooking or housekeeping, or balancing the checkbook
* Make decisions independently
* Learn how to manage your own legal and financial affairs.
* Learn how to be strong and survive despite great adversity

One of your goals while grieving should be to look at yourself as a whole, capable human being, not just "half of a couple" or "Cody's mom".

You must eventually figure out who you are now. Instead of "What would (s)he do?", you must realign your thinking to "What do I want to or need to do?"

An unexpected benefit of your bereavement may well be an increased sense of self-esteem and self-reliance. You have had to redefine your life, rediscover yourself, let go of the old hopes and dreams, and plan for a future without him or her. You have met all the challenges, and you have survived! You have a right to be proud... You are a resourceful and resilient human being!

POSTPONE DECISIONS

It is a wisely accepted recommendation that people who have lost a significant loved one should not make any major decisions or life-altering changes for the first year after the loss. While newly bereaved, it is hard to think straight and make important decisions without emotions interfering.

Decisions you should postpone for a while might include:

* Selling or buying property
* Moving from current home, unless absolutely necessary
* Adopting a child or choosing to get pregnant
* Changing jobs or careers
* Making major decisions about your life partner (marriage, divorce)

If you sell belongings or plan to move, you may just be running away from the situation instead of meeting grief head-on. Don't make decisions just to try to avoid the pain. "Work through grief where things are familiar", advised one widow from a support group.
FIND MEANING IN THE LOSS

It may help you resolve your grief by finding some meaning in or purpose in the death. If you find that you just cannot close that chapter, it may help for you to find a charity or philanthropic cause to channel your energy. Find and promote a cause related to the manner of death that claimed your loved one.

Possibilities might be a memorial scholarship fund in their name, donation of time or money to MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving), fund-raising activities for a cancer organization or lobbying for stronger fire safety regulations, or swimming pool enclosure laws.

Projects like these may help you find a purpose in an otherwise senseless death. It might just help you feel that your dear one's death was not in vain.
WHAT “SILVER LINING” HAS OCCURRED BECAUSE OF YOUR BEREAVEMENT?

HOW HAVE YOU BECOME MORE SKILLED AT DEALING WITH LIFE SINCE LOSING YOUR LOVED ONE? IN WHAT WAYS?
“The world is round and the place which may seem like the end may also be the beginning.” ~Ivy Baker Priest

* Are you tired of grieving?
* Are you ready to get your life back?
* Do you want your freedom?
* Is it time for a final farewell?

Most people are not ready for this step until at least a year has passed since the death. And the exact time cannot be pinpointed, either. Don't even consider this step toward freedom from bereavement until the time is right, or it won't work. And only YOU will know when you are truly ready for it.

Later in your bereavement, you will reach a point where you are ready for some serious closure, and a Goodbye Letter is a very good technique to help facilitate this.

PURPOSES FOR THE GOODBYE LETTER:

* Take care of unfinished business with your lost loved one.
* Say things to him or her that you always wanted to say but never did.
* Forgive him or her.

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*Apologize for things you did wrong.
*Ask for a blessing from him or her to get on with your life.

**WHAT TO WRITE?**

It is best in an exercise like this to be honest, and address both the good and the bad in your relationship. Here are some things you might want to say in your goodbye letter to your lost loved one:

**THE GOOD:**
* I loved you for...
* These things I miss the most about you...
* Thanks for...
* I appreciated...
* I was so proud of you for...
* I will never forget...

**THE BAD:**
* Things I don't miss about you...
* I was ashamed of you for...
* I wish this could've been different or better in our relationship...
* I know that some of the problem was MY fault...
* But part of it was YOUR fault, too...

**REGRETS:**
* Things I wish I had (or hadn't) said to you...
* Things I wish I had (or hadn't) done to you...
* I am sad because I have had to let go of this dream because you died...

**COMPLETE YOUR LETTER:**

* I love you and miss you, but I have to let you go now.
* You are causing me too much pain, and I can't bear it anymore.
* Please give me your blessing as I return to my life without you.
* Goodbye.

A word about forgiveness: When you truly forgive someone (in any situation), you don't condone their behavior, you are simply ceasing to feel resentment against the offender for it. You are done with the pain the wrong caused you, and you are releasing the resentment.

Forgiveness has nothing to do with the other person. It has everything to do with YOU. And sincere forgiveness will set you free.

**NOW WHERE DO I MAIL IT?**

Of course, you can't. But your letter does need to be "delivered". Most grief counselors agree that the most effective way to do this is by reading it aloud in the presence of another person.
This method lends an air of finality and closure, and somehow makes it more "official". Make sure the "witness" you choose is safe and can be trusted with this most private part of you. Not someone emotionally involved, like a close friend or family member. A good choice would be an impartial counselor or clergyman.

If you find that you just cannot read your letter to someone else, consider these alternatives, but remember to read the letter OUT LOUD to your loved one. (This is important):

* Make a trip to the cemetery or site of the scattering of ashes. 
  Read the letter out loud to your lost one.
* Go to a peaceful and private outdoor setting. Read it to the sky.
* After the reading, burn it and send smoke signals to your beloved.
* Read it out loud then bury it in the good earth. Ashes to ashes.

**SOME LAST THOUGHTS ABOUT SAYING GOODBYE**

Saying goodbye to your lost one in a farewell letter does not mean you will forget him or her. It is not a sign of disrespect, nor does it mean that you didn't care or love him enough. It may help you to consider this a "Completion Letter" rather than a "Goodbye Letter".

All you are doing is signifying in a concrete way that you are a survivor, and that you have decided to carry on with a fulfilling life despite your tragedy. It is time now to move the tender memories of your deceased to a special place in your heart and mind, to learn how to detach yourself from the grief for most of your waking hours, so you can get on with the business of living. You were only given one life, and you have decided now to get back to it.

~"I wanted a perfect ending. Now I've learned, the hard way, that some poems don't rhyme, and some stories don't have a clear beginning, middle, and end. Life is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, without knowing what's going to happen next. Delicious ambiguity"  ~Gilda Radner

(Editor's Note: Gilda Radner died in 1989 at the age of 42 from ovarian cancer.)

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CHAPTER 16 - BOX UP THE GRIEF/ TAKE DOWN THE ALTAR

“There is no grief which time does not lessen and soften.”
~Cicero; Epistles (IV, 5)

This is a two-part lesson. Part One is a psychological exercise for dealing with grief. Part Two is a practical method for putting away mementos of your loved one when the time is right.

PART ONE - MIND GAMES

There comes a time during bereavement when your grief mellows; when you need to function again out there in the public. How do you deal with this? There are some simple strategies that can help you get through the day.

You may feel sometimes like you never want to quit mourning! Yet your mind tells you that you’ll have to one day get back to the business of living. Life has gone on for all the folks around you. They are not trapped in the darkness known as bereavement, and after many months have passed, they will expect you to rejoin the land of the living, too.

I would like to stress again that there is no timetable for grief, that only you can decide when to proceed with closure and relinquish the hold that grief has had on you. But one day, probably more than a year after the loss, you will be ready.

How to proceed with this; how can you learn to let go? **By boxing up your grief.**

Boxing, though you might know it by a different name, (parceling or bracketing) is a well-known psychological strategy for dealing with recurrent problems. It could be anxiety, a bad habit, addiction... or grief. It keeps you from being overwhelmed by your emotions or obsessions. It is a method for compartmentalizing certain thoughts that come to mind so you
can more effectively deal with them. It is a harmless and helpful technique.

**And this is how it works:**

Visualize an actual box of some kind, a brown cardboard box, a white shoe box, a carved wooden jewelry box. It doesn't matter, just so you can evoke the image in your mind.

When thoughts of grief come to you during the day, postpone them by "boxing them up". Place your grief thoughts in the box, and promise yourself you will open it up later that day. But for now, you will not dwell on the thoughts or deal with them. You will set aside time later for that.

Then, in the evening, open your box of thoughts for 15 minutes (bedtime is usually convenient and private). Allow the thoughts to consume you at that time. Hold nothing back. This is your special time to indulge the grief. It is most important that you don't skip this step, or the system will not work.

Your mind needs to know that if you deny yourself the grief during the day, you will give yourself the luxury of allowing it in at night. Limit the ruminations to 15 minutes, then close the box up. You may choose to end the session with a prayer.

This method, of "boxing up the grief", allows you to detach yourself from the painful memories for most of the day, and is a much-needed and healthy respite from your bereavement. You will find that as time goes on, you will need to open the box at night less and less often. You are healing from your grief.

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**PART TWO- FREE UP SOME SPACE**

Unless you are ready for it, you might not understand this strategy... time to take down the altar. Later in your bereavement, you will come to a point where you can no longer bear to face your "altar of memories" anymore.

At this point, it is time to put away most of the mementos to your loved one (dismantle the altar). It is appropriate and quite normal to keep a photo of your loved one displayed in your home for a while longer, if you want to (even this eventually should go in your memory box for storage).

In order to find closure and end excessive grieving, you need to box up the mementos from your loved one. Find an appropriate box and place in it a selection of photos, letters, awards, souvenirs, perhaps an article of clothing. If you have a display table or altar to your beloved, time to clean it off.

Give away all of his or her clothes, except for a few items you will actually wear. His or her...
belongings... free up some space by doing some "spring cleaning". Get rid of all of his old books, CDs, tools, collections and hobby items, anything you will not use, and give it all away, or sell it. Anything that is left, give to charity.

In removing his or her belongings, you will find some much-needed closure. You will get rid of unnecessary reminders, and you will de-clutter your house. In freeing up some physical space in this way, you will find it easier to live there.

Symbols from the past will weigh you down. Get rid of them or put them away in the memory box and store it on a shelf in your closet. You will feel the need to pull down the box on occasion to revisit your loved one. But you will eventually find the need to visit your memory box occurs less and less frequently.

Life goes on. Healing continues.
“Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end.”
~Seneca (Roman philosopher, 1 AD)

Losing a significant loved one changes you and your life forever. You will go through a metamorphosis as you grieve. You will eventually come full circle, and back to some semblance of a satisfying life. But it will be a different life. You can never return to the innocent, happy, unblemished existence you had before your disaster struck.

After your grieving is done, you will have reinvented yourself just as you redefined your life. It's all about change. New relationships, new interests, and a new outlook on life.

NEW RELATIONSHIPS

It is not healthy for you to rush to find a quick replacement for your deceased mate or child.

You may be tempted to take this route in an effort to reduce the pain. It may make you feel better for a while, but it sabotages genuine closure of the grief process. It robs you of the intensity and depth of your loss. This intense grief, although painful and unpleasant, MUST be felt before closure can occur.

Pursuit of a "replacement" is also not fair to the new person, who will likely not be cherished and valued in his own right, apart from the tragedy. They will not appreciate being a "surrogate". No one would.

So the decision to remarry, adopt or get pregnant should be postponed for as long as
possible after the death.

That being said, after you have grieved through months and months of loneliness and solitude, there will come a time when you will NEED new people to enter your life. This does not dishonor or demean your lost loved one. Although your beloved can never be replaced, it's okay to fill the void in your life with a new relationship when the time is right. It is simply a reaffirmation that you are still alive. You cannot stay married or in an exclusive relationship with a dead person forever, or you will die too.

NEW INTERESTS

It may seem a little shallow or inappropriate for you to embark on a new project or hobby at a time like this. Yet such a diversion can provide just the comfort or distraction you need to ease you through your long days of mourning.

Was there ever a hobby or new skill that you regretted not pursuing? Now is the time for it. What can you do that's new and interesting? The world is wide open...

*Take up knitting or crochet. Knit a soft comforter in your favorite colors. Wrap yourself up in it.
*Check out some library books and learn the basics of woodworking. Make a memory box or a bookshelf.
*Start a "square-foot" vegetable garden or plant some exquisite rose varieties. Savor the earthy smell of tilled soil or heavenly rose scents.
*Buy a 20 gallon fish tank and stock it with Oscars or other exotic species. Tend to it daily and enjoy watching the fish.
*Take guitar or piano lessons. Fill your living room with sweet sound.
*Start bike riding or jogging daily. Get a skip-proof CD player and exercise to your favorite music.
*Paint your bedroom, rearrange the furniture and clean out the closet. Take the clutter to the nearest donation center.
*Take up watercolor or pastel classes at the local adult-ed center. Paint your grief. What color is it?
*Join the church choir. Promise you won't sing too loudly. Glory in the sound of the voices as they harmonize.
*Join an environmental group. Find a cause to donate your time to. Get involved.
*Find a charity related to the manner in which your loved one died. Find a way you can help promote the cause.
*Try your hand at fishing or learn how to sail a small boat. Enjoy being out on the water.
*Learn about hydroponics and construct a small unit to grow herbs or heirloom tomatoes in (www.hydroponics-simplified.com). Fascinating.
*Join a poetry workshop. Attend some readings. Nurture your soul.
*Join a bird watchers group. Buy a nice camera with a telephoto lens and capture the beauty of nature.

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* Investigate the local Y. Take up yoga, aerobics or aqua-cize. Determine to treat your body right. Finally.

You have changed because of your loss. Let your soul evolve and welcome new dimensions into your life. It will create a focus for your energies and provide healing activity. Reach out to others in your days of need. Find some new interests and meet some new people.

In so doing, you will find your way back to life. For life truly is rich, and precious... and worth celebrating. Even without your loved one at your side.
FORMULATE A PLAN TO MEET NEW PEOPLE AND INVESTIGATE A NEW HOBBY OR INTEREST. JOT DOWN SOME POSSIBILITIES HERE:
CHAPTER 18- STOP THE VICIOUS CYCLE

“Freedom is the oxygen of the soul.” ~Moshe Dayan

* Are you stuck in a complicated grief?
* Don't know how to resolve it?
* Ready to reclaim your freedom?

Time for the big guns!

This exercise is meant to be used only after your grief process has run its course. If you find that after a reasonable mourning period (which can take up to a year or two, depending on the circumstances) you are still stuck and incapacitated by grief, then this technique may well help you when nothing else has.

Take warning, though, this exercise is not meant to be used during the normal mourning process. It is important that you work through your grief fully. This method is only meant to help you get "unstuck" if after months of ongoing grief, you find you have failed to progress.

Most people know when they are stuck in unresolved grief:

You have grieved for a long, long time. Well over a year. You feel deep down inside that maybe it's time to stop hurting. You are tired of the pain, but just can't seem to get past it. Your grief is crippling you. You seem stuck in one place, not changing. You may be fine for a time, but then it comes back. Not just brief periods of sadness and painful memories (this is normal). But long stretches when you just can't cope well or function because of the grief.
This is unresolved grief.

We present here a special "guided imagery" technique that you might find helpful. It is called "tracking" and is proposed by psychotherapist V. Vernon Woolf. He thoroughly explains the theories behind this process in his book "Holodynamics". The book is quite deep and thoughty. It is not easy to follow, but if you like to delve into the deeper meaning of life, get a copy of it. Just be forewarned, it is NOT a light read.

For those of you who are looking for a way out of complicated grief, we explain and simplify Mr. Woolf's process here for you in Grief Exercise #18.

This, basically, is the premise behind the process:

You are the master of your own destiny. Every experience you have or emotion you feel is due to your own choice.

What???
What a sobering notion... you may be causing your own misery?

But if you think about it, this is the truth. Your thoughts are your reality, right? You allow your mind to make choices of thought and emotion. You have the power to choose what to think, how to respond, what moods to embrace. You are not a slave to your own mind. When your grief loss was new, you allowed yourself to feel blinding pain and grief. But that was a good and healthy thing for that time. But now you have decided you've had enough!

This knowledge is empowering. You actually have the ability to create your own emotional future! If you stay locked in a vicious grief cycle, miserable and crippled, unable to find any happiness in your life, it is because you choose to.

You have the power within you to break this terrible cycle, stop the interminable suffering, and rejoin the land of the living... but only if you want to.

This technique will not work for you unless you have the will to change. You must truly want to free yourself from your heavy burden of grief.

If deep down inside, you really want to keep on mourning the rest of your life, that's okay. It's your decision. We are not here to judge or criticize.

But just know that intent and will have everything to do with successfully overcoming excessive and stagnant grief. If you truly want the grieving to end, but just don't know how to make it stop, read on...
This technique is surprisingly useful for any problem you might have in your life; be it a phobia, bad habit, addiction, relationship problem, or career dilemma. The process may sound a little crazy on the face of it, but it works. It is safe and easy to learn. It has worked for me and several people I know to get rid of all kinds of emotional baggage that was holding us back from a more fulfilling and satisfying life.

Ready, then? Here's a summary of the steps you must take:

1. Identify the problem
   Step out of the problem or situation so you can get a better view of exactly what it is, and how best to deal with it.

2. Accept & embrace the problem
   Accept that it is your problem, and therefore a part of you. Explore it gently and lovingly, and figure out it's intent. What benefit has it been providing you?

3. Transform or mature the problem into a guide
   The immature problem needs to be replaced with a mature life guide.

4. Bargain with your guide for help
   Ask your new guide if he is willing to teach you everything you need to know in order to solve the problem.

5. Establish open communication with your guide
   Will your new guide always function in a way that is fair, caring and beneficial for you?

6. Finalize the plan
   Will your new guide sit at your round table in your place of peace? Will it always be there when you need advice? Will it help you overcome your problems?

Sound complicated? Goofy? It's really not. If you are reading an e-book, just print this entire exercise out. Sit down somewhere peaceful and private, and follow the instructions, step by step. Reread each section as needed. The process is not hard, and does not take long. You can perform the entire exercise in one sitting, if you go into it with an open mind and the desire to succeed. The mind is a wonderful thing.

STEP 1

Your first task is to get in touch with your problem, give it a physical form, and acknowledge that it is there.

Mr. Woolf proposes that your "problem" (unresolved grief) must be contacted, or pulled up
from within your mind. He calls the form of your problem a "holodyne". Don't worry about that fancy name. What he means is that you must reach inside your mind in order to identify exactly what the root of the problem is, what is causing you difficulty.

How do you do this?

1. Find a quiet, calm, private place where you will not be disturbed. Seat yourself comfortably. Close your eyes and imagine yourself in the most peaceful place that you can think of. It can be a serene meadow, a sunny beach, or a cool green mountaintop. Take the time to truly imagine your place of peace in your mind's eye. Use all your senses, to see the colors, experience the sounds, smell the odors, taste the tastes, and feel the atmosphere of this most peaceful place. When you are fully relaxed, your mind is calm, and you have found your peaceful place, it is time to begin your work.

2. What is the problem you want to solve? (To get rid of excessive grieving). Allow yourself to re-experience the situation, in all it's emotional impact. What seems to trigger it? What feelings and emotions does it bring up? When you are sure you are at the place of greatest distress, figure out what your part in the problem is. Can you claim this feeling as your own creation? You must own the problem before you can find solutions to solve it. Would you like to quit contributing to this problem? Yes? Then continue.

3. It is time now to access the specific "holodyne" that is directly creating your undesired reaction. It is there if you look for it. Find the form or manifestation of your "problem child", and sense it's physical presence. Give this "thing", presence or holodyne a FORM, so that you can easily find it and identify it in the future. It may be a small child, or a red devil with horns, or a large burning tornado. It can even take the form of a smell or a taste. Don't be frightened of it. Accept it immediately when it appears. This is the root of your problem! You're halfway home!

4. Now take a good hard look at this holodyne. What color is it? Does it have a shape? Can you sense it? Smell or taste it? Say it is a black furry blob that smothers you. Give it a name if you want to, like "George". George is immature, and has been having you react in ineffective ways to your outside world. Now you need to realize that this immature holodyne is what has been blocking you from solving your problem (getting past excessive grief).

5. Once you have accessed the holodyne and found a shape or form you can sense, given it a physical manifestation, you are ready for step 2, acceptance.

STEP 2

The second step is to accept the immature holodyne as a friend. He is a part of you. The first
step towards liberation is love and acceptance of yourself (which includes your imperfections and problems). George is a part of you and therefore deserves unconditional love and acceptance.

1. Talk to George. Ask him questions. Will he communicate with you? What has it been doing to you? Why has it been a block to your happiness? What does it really want, and how has its behavior helped its intent? In other words, what benefit have you realized by this behavior? What is its true motive in your life right now? (Why does it want you to grieve forever? Is it afraid to face new relationships alone? Is it afraid you will not be able to take care of yourself alone? Will giving up grief also be giving up a comfortable grief-support-system? Do you feel safe and secure in your grief state?) THERE ARE BETTER WAYS TO ACHIEVE THESE OBJECTIVES.

2. Thank it and tell it that you love and accept it and want to continue communication with it. Accept and love him, embrace him, for all his immaturity. Once you accept him, with all his faults, he will tell you all about what he has been doing and why. You will then know why your problem has persisted even though on a conscious level you may have resisted and fought it. Tell him you understand why he does what he does, and you love him anyway.

3. Now, what is it you really want (to let go of grief)? Imagine what it would feel like to have what you really want, which is peace and happiness. The holodyne really wants that, too, it just goes about it in an ineffective manner. It doesn't know how to get what it really wants in the best way. Ask him if he will help you change. You may have to reason with him and convince him that you really do want to change your circumstances.

4. Once you find out the holodyne's positive intent, thank it, stay friends and move on to step 3, transformation.

STEP 3

In Step 3, you will transform the holodyne into a mature form, and in so doing, free it up to proceed with the mature work of problem solving.

1. Go back to your place of peace and relax. Take the time to really relax. Now start thinking about the immature holodyne, George. Can you picture him as a mature holodyne? Ask for a new, mature image, and it will come to you. What can George do or be in order to accomplish a more positive outcome for your problem? This new image will look, feel and act different than the old holodyne, who has outworn its usefulness. Picture the new, mature holodyne in your mind's eye and give it a new form or manifestation. You cannot proceed until you are able to get this new, mature image.

2. Will the new mature image (we'll call it Dan) help you accomplish what it is you really want? Can the new image thank the old, immature one for all that it has done?
Does the new one truly have the power to accomplish the positive intent?
Is the immature one willing to allow itself to grow up and to be transformed into the mature one?

3. If the immature holodyne is willing, let it be transformed right now. The process is easy, quick and obvious. The new mature holodyne simply absorbs the old one, and that's it. If the old one is not willing, you will have to keep visiting and talking with it until you can figure out why he isn't ready. Reason with him, and convince him that you are determined and dedicated to this transformation.

4. Once the transformation is complete, commit the new holodyne to be there for you. He will be your guide. The old, immature holodyne is gone forever. Make a pact with your new guide to be there for each other from now on. Make sure you complete this step before going onto step 4.

STEP 4

In step 4, you bargain with your new, mature guide, and establish guidelines for behavior.

1. Will the new holodyne (guide) be there and help you find the solution to your problem?

2. Ask it directly: "Are you willing to teach me everything I need to know in order to solve my problem?"

3. Once dedicated, the mature holodyne is ready to help you whenever you need it, in a mature and effective manner.

STEP 5

In step 5, you will establish open communication with your guide

1. Will your new guide always function in a way that is fair, caring and beneficial for you?

2. It is important for you to know that your new guide has integrity and love for you, and will always act in your best interest. Communicate how important this is to you.
STEP 6

Congratulations! You’ve come a long way. You’ve done some hard, soul-searching work, and laid the groundwork for a happier future. The seeds of your success are now in place! Now what?

In step 6, you finalize your plan. Invite your new guide to become a big part of your life and meet with you on a regular basis. Mr. Woolf mentions a round table meeting. Use that in your mind. Create an image of your new guide meeting with you, whenever you want or need it, at your round table in your place of peace. What a rich resource at your disposal. It is important that you follow through and use it.

1. Plan now to meet with your new guide at least twice daily, at least in the beginning. Find a safe, quiet, private place. Sit and close your eyes and go to your peaceful place. Convene a meeting around your round table, and invite your mature holodyne to sit with you. Give him an assignment. Ask it to help solve your problem, and report back to you. Ask what you can do to help. And do it.

2. When your problem (excessive grief) reappears, if convenient, stop and have a round table session with your guide and ask for mature guidance to deal with it. If a meeting is not convenient, simply postpone everything until you can safely convene a session. Then listen to the wisdom at your table. All the answers are there if you choose to listen to them.

3. Your round table is power! You have the means to solve all your problems, work on projects, and celebrate life. You can create more than one holodyne, and discuss all your problems with them. You can have them do all kinds of work for you. Specific assignments work best. This is powerful, and effortless, and spontaneous. It will get easier and easier the more you participate in it. I know this works, because I personally use it all the time.

Does this all sound a little crazy to you? Granted, some of the theories involved are a little abstract. And the concept of "holodynes" is a little "out there". But who cares? This works if you keep an open mind. Guided imagery has been considered an effective psychological strategy for decades. All Mr. Woolf's process of tracking has done is give you a concrete, practical system for tapping into the power of your subconscious, and regaining control of your mind and your life.

You have come full circle with the tracking process. You have identified and admitted your part in your problem. You have taken ownership of it. You have figured out what immature and ineffective coping mechanisms you have been allowing to govern your life and keep you in darkness. You have discovered that there is a better way, that you have input and power, and you have the resources immediately available to pull yourself out of the darkness. You should be proud of yourself. You are your own destiny, you know. You can choose life, and love and happiness, or pain, and darkness and misery. Your tools of change are ready. The choice is yours.
At the risk of influencing your own process too much, I want to tell you my story, and how tracking helped me. But I realized that it might be a little hard to understand the process without an example, so I'll give you mine.

I had a very ambiguous relationship with my (very alcoholic and emotionally distant) father, who died suddenly of a ruptured aneurysm when I was 46. The grief experts say that if you had an ambiguous (stormy) relationship, you will most likely experience complicated grief, which can be harder to resolve. And truly, I did not grieve very deeply or openly when he died. I never felt the searing pain that I felt I should have. A couple of years after his death, I began to realize that although I was functioning "fine", and I had no overtly paralyzing grief going on, I had not really resolved my father's death in my mind. It was unfinished business that needed to be addressed.

I utilized tracking to help me come to grips with the loss of my Dad.

1. Identify the problem
   Step out of the problem or situation so you can get a better view of what exactly it is, and how best to deal with it.

   I found that I had not forgiven my father, so I did not grieve him properly. This problem took the form of my father himself. But he was drunk in my image. I felt he was immature and dysfunctional. He was.

2. Accept & embrace the problem
   Accept that it is your problem, and therefore a part of you. Explore it gently and lovingly, and figure out it's intent. What has it been doing for you?
   I accepted that it was my problem, that I had created it. It took me a while to figure out the intent of my immature holodyne. As long as he stayed drunk, immature and ineffective, I could allow myself to resent him and not forgive him for his weaknesses and failures. This made me feel self righteous and better than him.

3. Transform or mature the problem into a guide
   The immature problem needs to be replaced with a mature guide. I allowed the immature image of my holodyne to transform into a sober, strong, bright man, wiser than I was. I felt I had something to learn from him. I allowed the old, drunk, immature holodyne to transform into the new, wise guide. I made sure I told the old holodyne that I loved him very much, I forgave him and I told him goodbye.

4. Bargain with your guide for help
   Ask your new guide if he is willing to help you learn everything you need to know in order to solve the problem. My new guide was immediately willing to help me. He was bright and articulate. He did not look like my father. He was young and dynamic, and sober, and he knew a lot.

5. Establish open communication with your guide
   Will your new guide always function in a way that is fair, caring and beneficial for you? I trusted his integrity. I felt that he loved me, and would always work for me in my best interest.

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6. Finalize the plan
Will your new guide sit at your round table in your place of peace? Will it always be there when you need advice? Will it help you overcome your problem? My new guide is always at my round table, whenever I have need his advice. He helped my forgive my father, he allowed me to grieve, and he allowed me to finalize that chapter of my life.

I still think about my father every now and then, and I feel sad about how his life went, and his untimely death, and how we all miss him, especially my mother. It's okay for me to remember him and feel sad. But then it gets filed away again, and I get on with my life. I feel like my grief has truly resolved and come full circle. Forgiveness was a big part of it. Forgiveness is for the benefit of the survivor, not the one who has died. And that was so true for me.

My new guide helps me with other, different problems all the time. All I do is go to my place of peace, sit at my round table (mine is big, smooth and shiny wood) and ask my guide for help. I give him assignments to work on and he works on them effortlessly, behind the scenes. It's such a simple concept, but it works for me.

No one has to know about your round table, and your holodynes and your tracking. Honestly, they might have you committed if you told them what you were doing. But the mind is a wonderful thing, and it is well known that we only use a tiny portion of it's unlimited potential. If this exercise in guided imagery can help you tap into that wellspring of energy and intelligence, use it to solve problems and enrich your life, then go for it!

If you find that this technique doesn't work for you, that you do not consult with your trusted advisor, if you fall back into your old habits and problem at the first opportunity, it is because you are truly not ready to give up your old/unhealthy ways. For this to work, your must want your problem solved more than you want to stay where you are. It's that simple. Will counts in all this. Your trusted advisor is ready and willing to tell you everything you need to know in order to solve your problem and defeat your demons. If you don't access him and heed his advice, it's because you are not quite ready yet. He'll wait for you. Go to him when you are ready.

NOTE FROM EDITOR:
If you find that after giving this technique an honest and sincere try, it doesn't work for you, and you still just cannot find resolution for your grief although you truly want to, then please seek out a mental health professional to help you unravel your complicated grief.

There are definitely some grief situations which are beyond the scope and capabilities of this guidebook. An experienced grief counselor is needed in those circumstances. We urge you to get help when you need it.

We particularly recommend that you get help immediately if you have sustained or serious thoughts of suicide or just feel like you are losing control of your mind.

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YOU HAVE READ NOW HOW “TRACKING” AND HOLODYNES WORK:

MAKE AN OUTLINE OF HOW YOU ARE GOING TO ACCESS THIS AMAZING RESOURCE, USING THE 6 STEPS.
“The risk of love is loss, and the price of loss is grief -- But the pain of grief is only a shadow when compared with the pain of never risking love.”
~Hilary Stanton Zunin

How do you know when you are finished grieving?

You think you feel pretty much the same. Those sad thoughts and memories still visit you from time to time.

So how do you know when you have reached the last stage of grief, known as "resolution"?

First let me reassure you that resolution is not about forgetting, or the end of loving your lost one. You will never forget him or her, the important role they played in your life. No one can ever take away the memories or the things that he or she gave you that enriched your life. You will always have that.

One way to help you move towards ending your bereavement in a healthy way is to do some soul-searching about the motives for your grief..... and to fantasize about what your life would be like if your grieving was finally complete:

*Would you lose something in giving up the grief? (Sympathy and support from others?)
*Are you afraid you will forget your loved one? (You won't).
*Are you afraid that other people will think you are cold or unfeeling if you move
past your grief? (It's your life, not theirs)
*Can you visualize what your life will be like without the constant misery and pain of grief?
*Do you feel ready to reclaim some happiness and peace?

Resolution is not about forgetting, but about mellowing. Your task in the resolution of grief is to find a place for your loved one in your heart that will keep you connected with him or her, and yet still allow you to go on with life. You must withdraw somehow from the bereavement in order to live.

It may help you to think of this process not as "emotional withdrawal" but as "emotional relocation"... finding an appropriate place in your emotional life for your lost one that will allow you to move on. It won't be easy, but it has to be done.

Zisook explained it this way:

"A survivor's readiness to enter new relationships depends not on "giving up" the dead (loved one), but on finding a suitable place for (them) in his psychological life- a place that is important, but that leaves room for others (Schuchter & Zisook, 1986).

One counselor put it this way: “Recovery, the end goal of grieving, is not the elimination of all the pain and memories. Instead, the goal is to reorganize your life so that the loss is one important part of your life rather than the center of it. As recovery and healing takes place, you come to accept the loss, resume a 'normal' life, and reinvest time, energy and emotion into other parts of your life”.

And here is the best and most beautiful description of grief resolution I have ever come across:

"The emotional pain caused by loss suffered does not move toward forgetfulness. It moves, rather, in the direction of enriched remembrance; the memory becomes an integral part of the mourner's personality. The work of mourning has been completed when the (lost) person no longer appears as an absence in a barren world, but has come to reside securely within one's heart. Each of us must grieve in his own manner and at his own pace. For many people, one year seems to bring completion. Others require much more or much less time. Periodic waves of grief are often felt for the remainder of ones life. The mourning process must be given the freedom to find its own depth and rhythm; it cannot be artificially accelerated. A loss, like a physical wound, cannot heal overnight. There is no way to hurry the stages of tissue growth, and there is no way to speed up the healing process of mourning. But, when mourning has been completed, the mourner comes to feel the inner presence of the loved one, no longer an idealized hero or a maligned villain, but a presence with human dimensions. Lost irreversibly in objective time, the person is present in a new form within ones mind and heart, tenderly present in inner time without the pain and bitterness of death. Once the loved one has been accepted in this way, he can never again be forcefully removed."

For many people, resolution is the hardest task of grieving to accomplish. You may even get stuck at this stage, believing that your life in some way should have stopped when your loved one died. In some ways, it did. But time will help you eventually work through this belief, soften the pain, and permit you to find your way back to life.

Now here for you is an overview of "Back To Life", the Grief Guidebook:

*In the **beginning of grief**, you are wise to surrender to it, let it lead you through, to not control your mind or push grief away.

*In the **middle stages**, the "long haul", you learn how to live without your loved one, on a practical and emotional level. You must be gentle and patient with yourself during this time. You can start to "put aside" your grief from time to time when necessary during this phase.

*In the **final phase of grief**, resolution, it is time to reassert yourself and reclaim your life. You need to realize that at this point, you again become responsible for your own feelings. You are no longer a helpless victim of circumstances. You have the power of choice at this stage.

You can choose to remain in the shadow of death and grief forever, dooming yourself to die a slow, painful emotional death; or you can choose peace and acceptance, and reach towards happiness again.

Your loved one lost his or her life. You personally were blessed with a life of your own. But you only get one.

And right now, you are at a fork in the road on your journey of grief. The choice is now yours. I want you to choose life; as we all do... so please choose life. And bless you on your journey towards freedom.
DISCLAIMER

Griefwork is serious business. Bereavement is by far one of the most overwhelming and challenging situations a human being will ever find himself in. As a provider of information for the bereaved, we take our responsibilities very seriously. This guidebook was created, and information is provided in a spirit of compassion and love by experienced health care providers.

However, we are not physicians or licensed mental health providers. We do not practice medicine or psychiatry, and have taken care to inform you of serious warning signs and encouraged you to seek licensed professional assistance when indicated.

The mission of Back to Life is to promote understanding of the grief process, and provide practical strategies for dealing with it. The information provided in this book is not a substitute for assessment, diagnosis and treatment of any mental disorder. It is not intended to substitute for the services of a mental health care professional. It is intended for instructional purposes only. The use of this information is solely at your own risk.

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