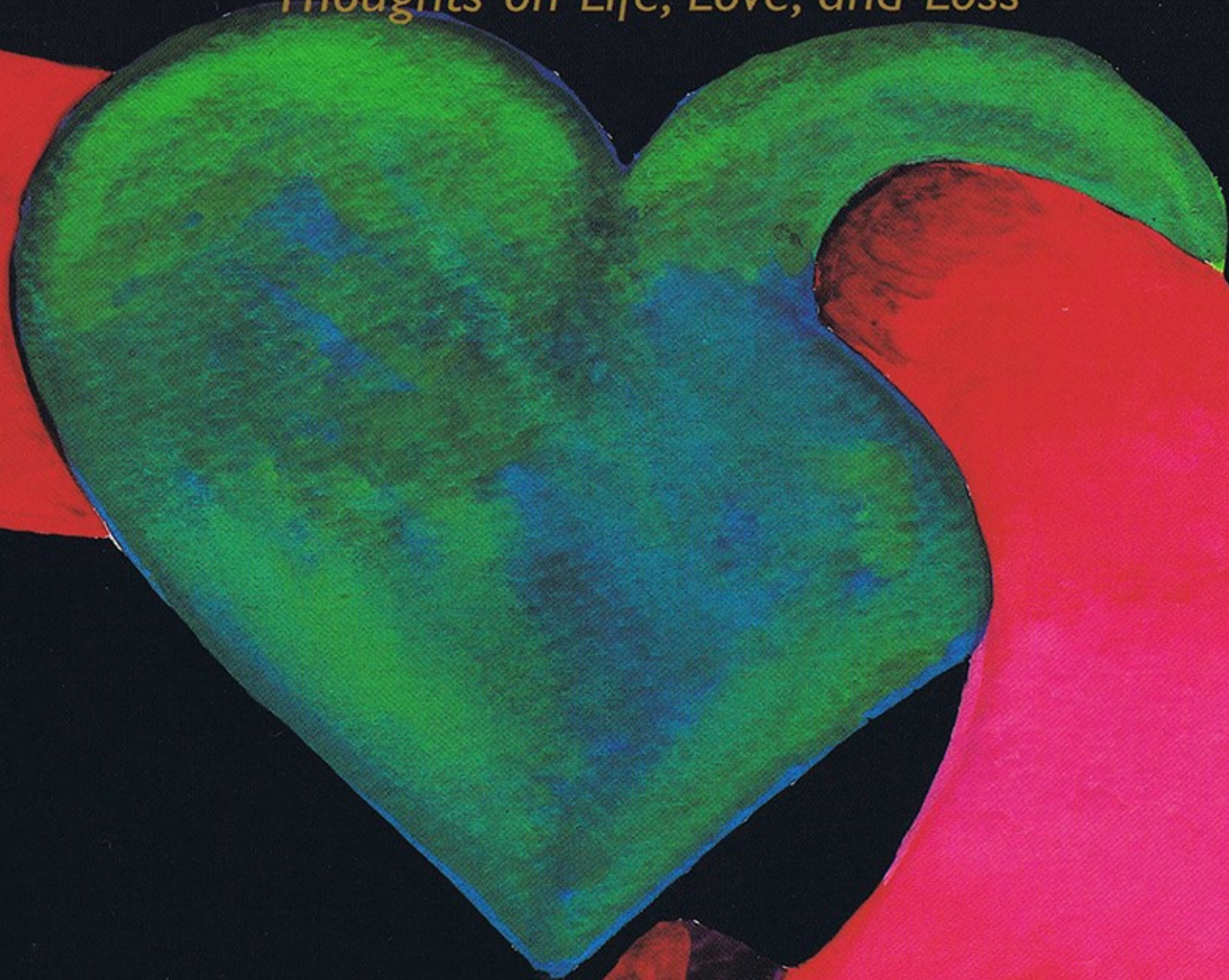


A Hole in My Heart

Thoughts on Life, Love, and Loss



Charlene
Fontaine

A Hole in my Heart



Thoughts on Life, Love and Loss

Charlene Fontaine

www.FontaineWellness.com

Are you mourning the loss of a loved one, job, relationship, or a missed opportunity? Inside you will find understanding, friendship, and honest advice wrapped in compassion and caring.

Through poetry and prose, like a friend sharing over a cup of steaming tea, Charlene draws from her personal experiences to explain how to rebuild your shattered reality.



A Hole in my Heart

Charlene Fontaine

Print edition:

First Printing November 1996

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Printed in the United States of America

Cover Design: Tammy Miller

Photography: Thomas M. Eaton

ISBN 1-878305-06-9<D

Suggested Categories: Loss, Grieving, counseling, Psychology

Electronic eBook edition:

First Printing March 2020

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Production: James R. Alburger, Cigma Media, San Diego, CA

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“Charlene Fontaine brilliantly uses her own personal experience to help us all heal the holes in our hearts! *Hole in My Heart* is a wonderful guide on grief and healing.”

Louise L. Hay, Best-Selling Author of *You Can Heal Your Life* and *Life Reflection on Your Journey*

“Loss of any kind is one of the most difficult and long lasting emotions with which to deal. The grieving process from such a loss was always done in private without guidance. Miss Fontaine has taken the process, brought it to the open and given us the freedom to feel pain without fear while teaching us to learn from the process. This book of prose and verse is an uplifting experience, one that provided me with new insight to healing the hole in my heart.”

Steve Marschke, Director of Membership Development National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, San Diego, CA

“Charlene shares her personal experiences with loss and gives others the courage to face their emotions surrounding a loss. Her style presents these difficult issues in a manner that everyone can relate to. A great source of on-going support!”

Heather Hurley, Director of Human Resources, Pinnfund USA, San Diego, CA

“This Book will definitely bring you over the mountain to new found wisdom. It brings a new understanding that every experience in life has something of value to be gained. Charlene has a unique way of getting people to open up and understand how to relate to themselves, others, and life’s experiences in general.”

Tom Snowden, Chief Instructor Arrest and Control, San Diego Regional Law Enforcement Training Academy

“Charlene is one of the most insightful and genuine people I have ever met. Her ability to communicate is uncanny. Her writing will significantly help many people deal with the loss of a loved one. Guaranteed to stir an emotion!”

Sgt. Chuck Marks, San Diego Harbor Police Department

Dedication

This book is in loving memory of Sidney T. Fontaine. In his life, he taught me love, growth, compassion, and acceptance. His suicide has given me untold “gifts”: most of all the realization to treasure each moment and the persons who share each moment, and to live in love and peace.

Acknowledgments

To Stewart and Loretta Fontaine, my parents, and to Stu, Steve, and Sally, my siblings, for their gifts of love, great sorrow, and acceptance. To my nephew, Austin, and niece, Kiley, for their inspiration of love, zest for life, and their sweet remembrances of Uncle Sid. To Sonya and Denny who married into our family and for just loving all of us. To all of my aunts, uncles, and cousins, thank you for being my family and supporting each of us.

To my dear Spiritual teachers in life: GaGa Lucas, PaPa and Uncle Henry Fambry, Grandma Fontaine, Mike Hammer, and Patricia Heavenston, all of whom prepared me for the day of change, not knowing when, where, or how deep it would take me. To my dear friend and minister Rev. Kathy Hearn, who has held me in love and compassion through this journey of loss, as well as kept me in the Love, while not letting me forget my work of “golden vision.” To my dear friend, Rev. Sandy Scott, who showed me I can be a minister, and who showed me the way, laid the palm branches of love and compassion for my battered soul, then loved me back from the depths of loss. To all the ministers in the Church of Religious Sciences, their practitioners and prayer teams, Rev. Cindi Bates at St. Luke’s United Methodist in Indianapolis, and all the other spiritual leaders who prayed for my brother, my family, and myself. To the officers of the Marion County Sheriff’s Department and the EMTs who supported my parents and cared for my brother.

To my greatest teachers—the teens who have blessed my life with their presence, wisdom beyond their years, gifts of joy and love; to Ian Wolds, Tammy Miller, and Nicole Macias, three very special teens who have held my hand, hugged me, and share their deep joy for life. Thank you for reminding me about unconditional love.

To Judy Davis, Manager of Bereavement at San Diego Hospice, for encouragement, review of materials, and guidance. To Heather Hurley, Martha Elam, Marcia Phillips, and Steve Marschke for proofing of the materials, and providing lots of support and love. To Mike and Phebe Arlen for assisting with the jewelry and love.

To the many friends who have given me space and time to grieve as well as to write. To my clients who have attended my training sessions, thank you for allowing me to share my pain and holding my hand. To the law enforcement teams who experience death daily and are learning how to grieve.

To the team at Central Graphics and to Don and Bonni at Manual Labour, thanks for making us look great, for the tissues, and the love.

And, finally, to James Alburger for helping with the file conversion, editing, graphics, website and production of this eBook.

A Time to Share . . .

I would like to share with you some of the family background that has led to the book you now hold in your hands. These are the events that have brought you and me together today.

Our family's story is very similar to most everyone's in the fact that we have all had joy, challenges, success, and lean times. My parents lived in Ohio, married, and started our family. Dad's career began as a tool and die maker and he retired as a supervisor of manufacturing engineers for Ford. Mom is a TQM (Total Quality Mom) for sure! She baked bread and drove a school bus after we all were in school. There are five of us, me being the oldest, then six years later Stu, then two years and two days later Sid arrived, one year later Steve, and in four years came, last but not least, Sally. As siblings go we are all close, supportive, and competitive. We were raised with love, and taught to be responsible for one another, to always do what is right, and to put our best foot forward.

We moved to Indiana during the second semester of my senior year in high school. What a change in our lives! As I look back on the past for answers, I sense that the real shock came to my family after Sid's motorcycle accident. That was in 1979. His bike stuck in a high-speed wobble at 100+ miles per hour. He did not have his leathers on so his skin looked like raw meat—but thank God, he was wearing his helmet! It was flat on the top. We all thought that Sid would fully recover, just like he had from other injuries. A few months after that, he had to be placed in a mental hospital for treatment. At that time, he was diagnosed as manic depressive, bipolar syndrome. We soon learned that a total recovery might not be possible. We also did not realize what a loss that accident would cost us all in the end.

These events started all of us on a path of growth, love, and deep understanding into how precious life really is. Sid's illness has given me many gifts. The two it has taught me the most are acceptance and compassion.

Charlene Fontaine

Forward

Judy Davis, Manager of Bereavement, San Diego Hospice

There is no adequate way to describe grief. If you have lived with, thorough, and beyond it's great and terrifying intensity, then you have your own understanding. If you have not lived grief, then you will read the words here and believe you have an understanding. If you are newly come to grief, you will likely read the words and hope you can find your way to some kind of understanding and life beyond.

Human beings have the power, courage and need to make sense of the events of life. We do it in personal terms. We seek examples, information, and encouragement from one another. We live with both our sense of ourselves as individuals and our sense of ourselves as members of community. Grief is a private and personal response to loss in our life and yet it is also shared and public.

When I first talked with Charlene after the death of her brother, Sid, she was intensely in pain and in the private process of trying to find some kind of understanding. I have seen her move slowly, carefully, and openly down her own path. She always had more questions than answers and that may always be so. The questions have changed over time and so have the answers. What has remained the same is the search for meaning.

Over time the nature of Charlene's journey and process has changed. She has become more public. In doing her own work of understanding, the hard work of grief has led her to a place of wanting to share what she has learned.

Actually, in trying to share what she has learned along the way with you, Charlene has had to first make it clear to herself. The very process of putting thoughts on paper forces clarity. It is truly a labor of love.

I would hope that you read what she has written in the spirit within which it was done. Always honor the effort it takes to be a person in grief and first be kind to yourself. Move at your own speed on your own path. Believe that you have it in you to survive the grief journey and believe that what you can learn from tragedy is really a gift.

My own belief is that the most honoring and loving tribute I can give to those who have died in my life is to live fully myself. My life and their memory are worth my best effort. I hope the same can be true for you.

Dear Reader:

This book started out as a poem, plus a few suggestions about what to do and how to cope with grief. It has grown into what you hold. I wrote it with several purposes in mind. The first was to express the deep sense of loss that I experienced after my brother Sid's suicide. The second was to share these feelings and what I have done to walk this path. The third and most important purpose to me is to broaden our awareness and educate all of us about loss.

These pages contain pain, tears, rage, but most of all love. The context is simple and profound. I've tried to make it easy to read and I hope it will speak to new depths and bring heightened awareness, understanding, and growth. What you like, use, what you do not like, let go. Writing this book has reinforced in me the belief that to grow, change, and expand as a person we must allow ourselves to be vulnerable in each moment, share our thoughts and feelings, and be confident in who we are as a total person. That will then support us in placing both feet firmly planted in mid-air and walking forward, knowing and trusting in our spiritual life.

The format of this book is not the norm, but neither is the content. In each chapter, you will find poems, prose, and suggestions for how to cope with the pain of loss from different perceptions. The appendix contains a source list for support and help. We all need to be supportive of one another during the process of grief, no matter how "trivial" or "devastating" its various forms may seem; to the individual, every loss must be dealt with, and each one of us has many turns walking this path during our lifetime.

Some of the concepts introduced in this book may be new to you:

1. Loss is change
2. Death is not our only loss
3. Grief is a gift
4. Honoring ourselves and each person in the moment helps us through our pain.
5. Loss costs us as individuals, families, communities, businesses, our country, and the world

I have discovered in my career as a trainer and consultant that most people do not want to face pain or change, and tend to avoid conflict. A loss of any kind is a wake-up call from life to start living at the highest level and to stop just "doing" each day. Everyone's loss looks a little different. One may lose a career, or an opportunity to express their private thoughts with a close friend, another may have a life-threatening illness; yet another may have a loved one who has died, while still another's may be an ending of a marriage and their dreams. Perhaps some of the most traumatic losses faced in our society today are related to a troubled world: rape, robbery, catastrophic losses, and domestic or workplace violence.

The only way to heal the pain of loss is to work through the pain. When you have gone through this, your world will have changed. Your world has already been altered, so I encourage you to take a look at you. Find the gift in your loss and have a new life. I know each one of you has the courage to start and the faith to complete the process. So, sit back, sense the love from this work, and allow your healing to hold you through this process.

You have my support, respect, and love,

Charlene Fontaine - San Diego, California



Chapter 1

The Losses in Life

**“Your joy is your sorrow unmasked.”
Kahlil Gibran**

A Hole in My Heart

There is a hole in my heart . . .
Can you see it? Do you sense my pain?
How does it look? Does it make you uncomfortable? Why?

It is only my heart, with all of my emotions overflowing
like the tears from my eyes so very, very deep from inside.
There it sits,
my heart exposed: torn, bloody, lost with no more direction to give
and nothing left to share but the devastating pain.
Loss of a loved one is that way.
It is like someone took aim, fired into the core of who I am.
All is different now . . . never to be the same.
The core of my life has scattered now.

In my mind, I scream “NO, No, No, it really can’t be true” or did I scream it out loud?
Denial looms over the hole in my heart to protect it by chasing away reality.
There is far too much pain, so it cannot be true!
Is one human who loves God so much, really to withstand that much pain?
Where is the love?

My life has stopped,
altered by one act, thought, and breath in time.
I am numb but I eat, dress, and work. I must be fine, after all “Life does go on” . . .
But as the days roll by, I feel on edge, nothing is right, I’m lost at night.
My finger points to blame. My anger turns into words of rage at any One, every One
and then on myself but especially to God.
Numb out again to escape that deep, deep pain that has now turned into anger.
TV, food, phone, or a drink, one of those will surely do the trick!
The hole in my heart is filling up with anger . . . Where is the love?

I search for those lost moments in time wishing to recover just a few.
Replaying in my mind of what I might have said or done differently
for that “special loved one” who no longer breathes on this side.
“If only . . .”, “I should have or I could have’s” rule my words and mind,
if only I could “turn back time.”
Now guilt and fear fill “the hole in my heart.”
What can I do now. . . this pain keeps dragging me down?
Fears of not being forgiven, not loving enough, not “being there,”
will fear win over love?

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Where is the love? Where is the gift in this tragic loss? Where is God?
Nothing seems to take this pain away. Someone said "tears are cleansing."
If I cry all day, that will surely take this pain away!

A few months have gone by now and some say,
"What is wrong with you? You're sad all the time. Get on with your life!"
They were once "friends," now only a name.
I have discovered grief takes much energy, lots of work, and most of all time.
New friends are found in support groups, counseling, church, and work.
I find people who understand my pain are educated enough to say,
"I cannot feel or know your pain. I'll listen with my ears, support you with hugs, and give
you tissue to wipe away your tears. I may not say a word, only know I'm here."

Talking really helps, especially with people who are walking a similar path.
Group meeting days bring knots to my stomach,
everything in me fights so I will not have to go but when I honor this pain,
My soul feels better for just having shared these overwhelming emotions.
Great sadness, sorrow, darkness, and depression now fill the "hole in my heart."
Will this ever end or even get better? Does it lessen? Will I ever laugh again?
The bottom of the pit has arrived.

In this deep place of depression, I have moments when I feel "like" close to "normal."
Four months have gone by now. Some moments feel like it has been lifetimes,
while others seem like it was only a moment ago when my life scattered.
Some days are like a "real" day when tears do not flow.
Birthdays and holidays without him are like being a robot.
Expectations of the "first" one of any day without him is so very hard.

Now as the days roll into months, there is a kind of rhythm to my life.
I see my self as a bottle riding the waves of life.
Sometimes I'm up on the top of the emotional waves,
other times without warning I'm under the water of emotions gasping for air.
Overtaken by those feelings of loss: denial, anger, fear, depression, and pain.
The hole in my heart is now making a place for acceptance of this loss.
My role in life has changed. What do I do now? Who am I? How do I go forward?
Did I really make a difference in his life? Can I still touch other's lives?
I know that in this time of grief,
everything that is unsettled within me is "up" for healing.
All others touched by loss,
surely share this feeling but know not what it is.
This is one of the "gifts" in loss.
In this moment, our "loved one" reaches us from the other side,
presents us with all types of healings on so many levels.
If I choose to accept this precious gift by moving forward,
forgive,
feel the pain and heal,
my life will be blessed with love.

This is the time when the "hole in my heart"
starts "to heal," "to celebrate," and "to honor,"
all that was and all that is to be from loving this special One,
who now sits in my heart.

Loss is a strange thing. One minute the person or thing is there to be enjoyed, loved, touched, and savored. The next minute the person or thing is no longer in the form you knew and loved. They're gone in the blink of an eye, taking their last breath. No more for the senses to behold. The first reaction is shock: this cannot be happening! The next is that I cannot talk to or touch that loved one anymore. There is now a void my senses cannot understand. What about the love? Does it go too?

The process of loss occurs with all types of endings. The most common loss is associated with the death of a person. Death comes in so many forms: from illness, injury, natural disasters, wars, airplane, boat, and train accidents. When one person has died, their family and friends mourn. When a group accident occurs, the families are supported on a broader level. In group deaths, there is a sense of unity that often brings the survivors together.

But losses are not only from death. Few of us consider the more frequent types of endings as losses. These losses range from a teenager leaving for college or a child losing a tooth, to our inability to communicate our needs to those around us at work or at home.

Consider this list of common changes or endings that may be experienced in life:

1. Death, either sudden or expected, of a family member, loved one, friend, peer, or pet
2. Job or career ends
3. Divorce
4. Car, wallet, or some form of personal property stolen
5. Dream of relationship or career
6. Relationship
7. Job transfer, of parent or of self, from one city or state to another
8. Accident—partial mobility, broken bones, or body part severed
9. Graduating from various levels of schooling
10. Receiving driver's license
11. Physical innocence—virginity
12. Child leaving parent's home, for whatever reason
13. Home—burns down, or tenants evicted
14. Wedding
15. Birth, adoption, or abortion
16. Invasions of security or privacy (such as robbery, phone tapping, etc.)
17. Physical harm (rape, sexual abuse, domestic or workplace violence)

First, we must recognize that loss means change. And whatever the changes we experience, most people do not honor the feelings that come up. Some will acknowledge that there has been a change, some will deny their feelings about the change, and still others might let some of their emotions out for a moment, then move on with life. By not realizing that the above list reflects changes, then not dealing with each in an appropriate manner of grieving and going on, we instead detach ourselves from the emotions and carry them around as “extra” stress. This stress

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takes on many forms, such as addiction—any of the “have-to-have’s”: drinking, shopping, eating, etc. Most people do not realize that we all have our forms of addiction. But rather than trying to pretend we are not suffering from our losses or changes, if each of us would just allow ourselves to “feel” and express our emotions, be honest with ourselves, heal, and go on, we would all be in much better shape in all areas of life.

My losses started about as far back as I can remember. The first two came when I was nine. My Uncle Myron Fontaine died while in surgery. I was very sad, knowing that we would not draw or write together anymore. The next loss to hit concerned my schoolmate, Timmy Pflugner. He was crossing the street with his family and was hit by a car. He was buried in his baseball uniform. I can remember thinking that he would never smile again, nor would we grow-up to date. Then along the way, like most other children, pet burial became a part of life. Then during my teen years came grandparents and other family members. The first losses were profound for me. I can still see my friend Timmy in his baseball uniform and I still remember touching my uncle’s skin—so cold. I remember being told not to cry. Where did they go? Where did my tears and emotions go? Heaven was the place for *them*, but what about my tears? No answers were available then, mainly because no one really knew what to say or how to guide me or what to do.

At that time, I was told that these passing’s were “just a part of life” and to not get too emotional and “just go on with life,” then all would be fine. This was supposedly “sage wisdom” from the adults around me offering their coping skills. It did not feel right then and it definitely is not right for me now. “To go on with life” was the only way most adults knew how to deal with the emotions surrounding death. No one had given them the coping tools, either.

“Going on with life” might be fine if we were robots with no emotions to express or tears to cry. But we all have these treasures from within called feelings. So how do we deal with them? Where do our tears go? How can we express them and be “accepted” at this time and still grieve? Will we be seen as weak if we do?

I am not aware of any course in school that gives us guidelines for how to deal with our feelings, let alone a class that teaches us what they are. The majority of us in society today are not prepared to deal with feelings, especially when loss arrives. Some of us cope by drinking, shopping, playing, gambling, or drugging the pain away. The sad part about all of this is that we try to numb out the feelings instead of standing in the center of the hurt, feeling the pain, facing the feelings, understanding them, honoring them, receiving the “gifts” they bring—and then we can “go on with our lives”! Only after facing all the fears, emotions, and feelings can we be fully functioning human beings who have a good quality of life and success in all we do.

When we experience loss in our life, the dream of whatever the loss represented is now ended or changed. The love that enfolded the relationship with the person or thing also has the appearance of having ended. There are many fears and feelings that come up for each of us at that time. The loss can be as small as missing your wallet to being told your job has gone away, your career has ended due to a physical injury, or your marriage has ended, shattering dreams through the loss of a loved one. Whatever the loss, emotions, feelings, and fears will come up. It is your choice as to what to do and how you will deal with them.

Ten years ago, my younger sister Sally and I were in a car accident. I was partially paralyzed due to an injury in my neck. I wore a neck brace for a year and then regained more movement in my arms. At that time, I had to make a decision; I could stay in constant pain and feel sorry for myself and be legally disabled, or I could get up, follow my doctor’s orders, and work through the pain and tears with my physical therapist. My business was two years old at the time. My clients required that I travel extensively, recruiting for their corporations. How could I travel when I could not even carry a purse or hold my keys? So in one instant my life suddenly changed. During the shock, I cried and grieved over the pain every time I had to move my arms. Then I forgave the

woman who hit us, adjusted my attitude on life, shifted my business to incorporate other things that I loved to do more, and set my sights on success in a different career. Grieving paid off in a very big way!

The cost of choosing not to deal with grief sometimes cannot be counted until years later. I met a man through a client and we started to date. This man on the surface was loving, kind, happy, and would give you anything you asked. We shared stories, and found a common thread that brought us to our siblings who had both chosen to end their lives. This man had never grieved the loss of his sister, whose name was the same as mine. He had been divorced six years previously and still harbored a great deal of resentment and non-forgiveness towards his ex-wife for her actions and her lack of respect towards their marriage. He cannot and will not forgive her or call to talk to his children for fear of having to talk with *her*. I found out from his children that he does not support them on a regular basis as ordered by the courts. My dreams—as well as his and his children's—for a new life together were shattered because he chooses not to heal his pain from all of his stored-up grief.

One of the things that puts our life on hold and stops us from being all we truly are is grief. This grief can take form in various ways: unresolved, unexpressed, unexplored. It can really take all of us by surprise. As individuals, families, businesses, and society, we all pay a heavy price for not knowing how and when to deal with loss. In the dealing with the loss comes the healing. Without the healing, we subconsciously stop ourselves from living a life of joy and peace. A deep part of us wants to go back and “take care of business” from the past and heal, while another part of us says, “No way, it is too painful; leave it alone and all will be fine.”

“On Hold”

Some of us go through our days “on hold.”
Those days fade into months, then on into years and on.
Some “live” each day or at least they think and say they do.
But then one moment in time turns our world upside down . . .
Surely time will freeze at that moment . . . stop the world and go back but you can't.
Loss of a person throws us into reality at a very alarming pace
which calls us forward to “live” in the human race!

You go in and out of emotions, feelings, and denial.
You want to numb out. Pain now has a new meaning: intense, dark, and deep.
Sleep, eat, work, try to be normal on the surface.
Deep down inside there is a longing to cry, scream, and even die!
If I start letting these emotions out, can I stop or will I just fall in the dark hole too?
As you start to wake up from this dream state of life
you may realize you were really “on hold” all along.
So now what to do?
Will you choose to take life “off” the hold button? Will you continue denial?

It is your choice....
Choose to live in each moment
for that is all we have,
and Love is all we have to give!

Stored up emotions from loss can take many forms in our daily lives. They are actively at work on a subconscious level. We do not realize that we have been so deeply affected by a loss until it is years down the road of life. All of a sudden something happens to us and brings us back to that moment in time to re-visit and address the unhealed feelings and hurts.

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The major components that affect us while we are in a loss are change, uncertainty, trust, lack of control, and fear. When all of those factors are added to the cycle of grief, we can feel a bit on the edge, with nothing solid under our feet. Normal tasks like eating, talking on the phone, and working are very draining. Energy is low. It takes great amounts of energy to grieve and heal. Another area of our person that takes a hit is our self-esteem. We sometimes question who we are and where we go from here.

I would like to share with you the two things that brought me back to focus, kept me centered, and have served me the most during my times of loss. They are love and spiritual practices. Love to me is a force that is made up of compassion, understanding, awareness, and many other components. This love came from many different people of all religions, cultures, and ages. I am so very thankful for all the love I received, for without it I do not know how I would be today.

These gifts of love were as special as receiving cards and calls, up through a business associate giving me his family's vacation home in Mexico for as long as I needed it. Love showed up in so very many forms. The teens that I had worked with at my church sent cards and called to offer support and prayers. As director of the teen program, I had spent the week before Sid's death at our National Church Conference with fourteen teens. Three teens gave me so much love and support throughout the first year by calling, writing, and sharing life's joy and challenges. They live all over the country: Ian Wolds, Tammy Miller, and Nicole Macias. Tammy provided a special gift of pure love that was waiting for me when I returned from Sid's funeral. Tammy is an artist and had drawn a baby to bring me comfort. I have chosen to share her drawing with you on the following page, and I also asked Tammy to design the cover of this book.

Shortly after returning to my home in San Diego and following Sid's funeral in Indianapolis, I received a call from my dear friend Bernadette in Albuquerque. We have been through many challenges of life together. She hesitated to call because of my emotional state. What a gift that call was for me! Her son, Brian, needed some help. We had spent time together before and enjoyed talking. Brian had been in a car accident earlier that year and was having a challenge with staying clean and sober. His major issue was choosing whether to live or to end his life. He was in a treatment center when all of this happened. I asked when he would be out, and if I could call him or leave a message. The message was: "I love you, Brian; keep it together! See you soon!" I arrived the day after he was released.

Brian and I had long talks about life and its many challenges, as well as what we had both been going through. He asked me why I was not smiling as he had always seen me for the last five years. I told him that the face he now looked at was how someone looked after a death due to suicide. I was not sure if I would ever regain my sparkle and zest after Sid's death. Most important for Brian to remember was the look on my face and how drastically my life had changed.

I was so honored to be asked to come and be with Brian and his family, for they are like my own. I am happy to say Brian is doing very well and enjoys life from a different perception. That was one of the gifts my loss has given me.

Love is the cornerstone of our lives. *IT* is the energy we all want and need to survive. We spend untold money trying to find "it," when really all we need to do is go within and find that solid sense of what love really is, and then share it with all people, especially those in loss.

Spirituality is the common thread of love and good that runs through all of us. It is the glue of life that connects us to one another. It allows each of us to feel and understand another's joys and sorrows. Its source is from whatever form you call "God." Spiritual practices are habits, customs, or rituals that keeps us connected to "the Source" and add meaning to our lives. They do not have anything to do with any religion. The forms are as varied as there are people. They can

range from a positive statement about your life that you repeat daily (“I enjoy my life”), through forgiving yourself and all others, to saying a daily prayer.

Coping Suggestions

1. Spiritual Practices
 - a. Prayer
 - b. Meditation; reflective, contemplative, quiet time
 - c. Reading from sacred holy book(s)
 - d. Going outside in nature to connect with “God”
 - e. Practicing forgiveness and acceptance
 - f. Being appreciative, thankful, and remembering the good
 - g. Maintaining a sense of humor
2. When the news arrives of a loss, put that person in your heart and pray for them and their loved ones.
3. Ask for prayer(s), support, thoughts of compassion, and peace every day.
4. Take an action that holds that person’s love in your heart, e.g., light a candle, plant a tree or a flower.
5. Journal writing is a way to express your feelings. If you do not have one, just use some paper and a notebook. Find a safe, warm, quiet place to allow yourself to explore what is happening.
 - a. Write down all you can remember.
 - b. Start wherever you feel comfortable.
 - c. Sense what feelings come up for you from the loss. Write down whatever comes up in your journal (fears, hurts, pain, etc.). When tears come, let them flow; they are doing their job to help cleanse the pain away.
6. Your emotions may run the gamut from anger to great sorrow. Honor them. I encourage you to just sit with them and listen to what they have to tell you. Then write it out.
7. Go get support! The two groups that have been healing places for me are Survivors of Suicide (S.O.S.) and Compassionate Friends. S.O.S. is for the support of family and friends who have a loved one who has ended their own life. Compassionate Friends is a support group for parents whose child has died. The siblings group has been wonderful; I’ve been able to talk with others, and the parents have shared insights with me as to how and what my parents might be going through.

Spiritual Truth:

Life is Simple.
You get what you give.



Chapter 2

The Cycle of Grieving

**“...for everything there is a season...
a time to weep and a time to laugh...”
Ecclesiastes 3:1&4**

This quote from the Bible more than describes the process of loss, change, and grief. The process of grief consists of six stages. My experiences have taught me that this cycle touches every area of our lives, and it's not just brought on by the death of a loved one. These stages do not come in any order and will arrive out of nowhere to take you down to the feelings that need to be expressed. The stages have been labeled by many names but this is the way I have known them to be. And, oh yes, you will go through each of them many times.

1. Denial

This cannot be so . . . it did not happen. Shock and total disbelief. If your loss has been a sudden one, you will be in shock for a longer period than a loss that was expected.

2. Anger

At the person, self, “God” (higher power), family, doctors, drugs, the murderer, anyone, and or everyone.

3. Blame and Guilt

Should's, would's, could's, if only's: for the person, yourself, all involved. This is the finger-pointing stage.

4. Depression

You have now hit the bottom, or so you might think. This stage can take many forms, from not getting out of bed to working while being exhausted all the time.

5. Acceptance

This loss really has happened and on some level you start to accept it. This stage also comes back, again and again. Three months into the cycle, I remember sobbing my eyes out. It had finally hit me that Sid was gone. My brother would not be in Indy at his house anymore. Denial had finally shaken hands with reality. During the holidays, another hit was felt. It was the first time Sid would not be there to celebrate Christmas. What a very strange feeling. Another level of acceptance had occurred.

6. Celebration

There is a time for everything, and to me this must also be a part of the process. To honor the person, as well as yourself, for arriving on the other side of a very difficult, growth-filled process. This is the gift that the physical ending of a body or the change in a relationship gives to us. Each of us has been given the opportunity to choose to live life at a deeper level in each moment of

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each day. Tell those you care for of this fact each time you talk and keep them in your good thoughts and prayers.

The first five stages listed were taken from the writings of Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross on grief. The last is my contribution to the process. This cycle also contains many other dynamics. One is that of the “first year.” I have been told that for the grief process to be somewhat complete, it takes a time of transition from the person not being there. In the first year you will experience the gift of “first.” The first birthdays, holidays, or any type of activity or celebration without this person, place, or thing brings up issues to consider other than just grief from the passing. What to do for each “first” will be discussed in detail in Chapter III.

The Gift of Grief

When we resist doing a task
we make excuses as to why
or turn the blame to the other person.
The key to uncover these blocks is
found by standing in the center and embracing the pain.
Grief is a “safe time” to help uncover our past.
After all if we shed a tear after a great loss
no one will be surprised, it is only normal!
So let me see now,
we need an excuse to be sad or cry?
Some who do not understand
will hand you a pill for the pain.
No pill can touch this pain.
Grief is a “safe time” to let the walls down
feel your hidden pains
search for the real you and heal the wounds that remain.
Oceans of tears
could not wash this pain away
even if I cried a million years.
Time does not heal
nor fill the gaps,
it just passes.
But in each moment of grief there lie many gifts:
appreciation, joy, laughter, and searching, just to name a few.
The one that has passed on to the other side
encourages you to look deep inside
to find the treasure you are,
the gift you bring to the world
and the lives you bless with each word and action.

Let's look at loss more closely. There are two types of losses: sudden and expected. Be aware that each loss is different from the one before and brings mixed dynamics with the experience. A sudden loss occurs, for example, when death or an ending is from suicide, homicide, accident, heart attack, or stroke. It also occurs when a person is fired or laid off from their job, or when a relationship ends unexpectedly. If you are experiencing the sudden loss of a loved one or a job, you will add another dimension to the grief cycle. It is just plain and simple: **shock**.

The shock factor numbs the body and mind more than in the expected ending. Although the person is “doing” what looks to be normal, by no means are they functioning at a high level. If you've experienced a sudden loss, your mind will be numb, and this state can continue for a long period of time. During this time, I was very sensitive to noise of any kind that was sharp or loud.

Expected endings also contain some element of shock, but not to the depths of a sudden loss. An expected loss or ending may occur, for instance, with a death after a long illness, when a job is completed, when a divorce or separation is begun, when school ends, when a contract terminates, or when we don't take the time to do something we would enjoy.

Coping with Shock

1. Lists—I had three to keep me on track:
 - a. To do today - what really has to be done for survival
 - b. Needs - things that can be done in the future, i.e., wash clothes, clean house, dry cleaning
 - c. Food - items to eat that are healthy, not just junk
2. I also kept a 3X5 card with tasks to do for me to stay healthy—e.g., take herbs and vitamins, eat, shower, work out, spiritual practices, etc.

While in shock, we tend to fall apart but manage to fall back on what gets us through. Memory is one of the first things to be challenged. Shock feels like “auto pilot” for some and “being in slow motion” for others. Using lists makes functioning much easier. With that in mind, making a list for everything is an insurance against forgetting things. I suggest that you put no more than three things on the “to do today” list. Any more than that can be too overwhelming during this period. If there are more than three things on the list, call and ask someone else for their support. The lists are also great when someone asks how they can help. Hand them a list and let them choose how they really would like to help.

When the man I deeply loved, Dennis McGraw, died of a heart attack at the age of 44, I went into shock. My whole body, as well as mind, was numb. I know my heart was still beating, but it felt as though it had stopped. I had to pack clothes for the funeral and drive to Los Angeles from San Diego. When I arrived at the house of my friends, Priscilla and Don, they cared for me. Knowing it was too much for me to function, they fed me, told me what to wear, wiped my tears, and told me when to try to sleep. This shock did not wear off for about six months, and when it did, the real cycle of grief began. Seven months after “Den’s” death, another dear friend and mentor, Denny Flodder, died of AIDS. I wasn’t close to being back on my feet from the first change when number two hit me. The second loss was different. I had time to say “good-bye.” We talked about all the things we had done, how much we cared about each other, and how we touched one another’s lives. If each of us had the understanding and desire to live in each moment and express what we are feeling and thinking, our regrets at the time of a death or an ending might not be so many, nor the outcome so devastating.

In the late ‘80s and early ‘90s, I spent most of my time training corporate workers in out placement workshops, and providing one-on-one counseling for people who had been laid off from their jobs, downsized, or whatever politically correct word you might choose to use. Simply put, they had a career and a place of employment one day and the next day they were jobless. Some of my peers in the out-placement industry doubted my wisdom at spending so much time discussing the “grief process.” I discussed the process to establish how people felt about what had happened to them, going through all the questions in each stage and describing how to recover. Most of the people I saw looked like robots and were in shock. Overall, the jobless experience left most with an end to their dreams, no retirement, and uncompleted projects. Each experience of change in our lives leaves us the opportunity to grow and find a new way to live life. This growth does not come without pain.

A Hole in My Heart

Ego and Emotions

Some of us live life just as physical bodies rushing around,
Never enough of anything we desire
be it money, food, shopping, or time.

The days booked from sunup to sundown.
Our lives are filled with stress, pain, lack, and bills
that drive us to work
where pleasure, joy, and satisfaction
are not understood.

Emotions are not valued in the workaday world,
so they are pushed down by drinks, pills, smoking, and food.
All forms of denial for who we are and what we want.

Mental thoughts kick in of what life "should be,"
so we beat ourselves up for not being all that we can be.
The cave person mind,
our ancient ego of sorts,
has not grown up to match our space age thoughts.
So we are pulled back
running in time only to eventually lag behind.

But without missing a beat
our ego-mind still controls us to be mediocre at best.
When we try on a new thought
the ego goes ballistic sending up walls of protection
and our forward progress is stopped.

We forgot to explore
for the hidden parts of who we once were.
"What else is in there that can lift me out of this abyss?"
Look into the spiritual side where your intuition hides.
The creativeness of who you are,
the part that supports you and ties one to all
the grace of kindness which brings courage into play
and allows the good in each of your days.

Feelings and Emotions

One area in our education that is sorely lacking is an awareness and understanding of feelings and emotions. Every moment of our lives we have various emotions that come into play. They are triggered by our sensory experiences. Their source is our reactions, judgments, and interpretations of what is going on around us. Our emotions are almost always negative and block love. By blocking love, they block reality. Our feelings come from our perceptions of what is happening to or around us. They are our "sixth sense" and closer to reality. Our feelings are our intuition speaking to us, like "this feels right or wrong" or "I feel like I have known you before." We sense with our feelings.

Love is usually thought of as an emotion or feeling. It is neither. Love is a force or power. We make interpretations of emotions and sense them through our feelings. This is a connection between people, animals, nature, and everything.

The Cycle of Grieving

Every person has both emotions and feelings. Some choose to disassociate or cut themselves off from their feelings. Others choose to feel and express them. Our society teaches us that it is not okay to express these emotions or feelings (i.e., women and girls cry and are emotional all the time while boys and men do not cry or feel). We all need to understand that at some point in time, whether we have chosen from a conscious or subconscious perception to cut off or suppress these feelings, they will come back to visit in a form over which we have no control. The pain of the emotions and feelings needs attention and to be dealt with sooner or later. It is like the old business axiom, "Pay me now or pay me later." Our experience tells us that it is much easier and less painful to handle something up front than to put it off. It all goes back to our individual free choice. What will you choose?

The following is a compiled list of emotions and feelings. You might like to start your own list so you become more aware of which emotion you are sensing, when and if it's real, or if it's blocking your true emotions, and what feelings are coming up out of those emotions for you to deal with.

anger	attack, putting up a front, loss of control
boredom	can't keep self-occupied or entertained, own company isn't good enough
confusion	not sure what to do, inability to trust one's own decision-making,, lack of self-esteem
embarrassment	taking oneself too seriously
fear	opposite of love, belief in lack, inability to see own picture
grief/remorse	inability to accept change, desire to control, inability to accept the present condition, anger at the other person or situation
guilt	inability to let go of the past
hate	a belief survival is threatened, a desire to remove the object of the hate,, inability to admit you may be wrong
homesickness	wanting to return to the past or fear of the future, inability to accept where you are right now
hurt	lack of belief in your own coping abilities
jealousy	a belief in limitation, a belief that you cannot get something by yourself
loneliness	(same as boredom)
rationalizing	not wanting to believe what is right in front of your eyes or failure to accept what is,, not accepting the truth
regret	(same as grieving)
rejection	feeling you are not good enough, lack of self-esteem
resentment	(same as jealousy)
self-pity/depression	lack of belief in yourself, not wanting to believe what is right in front of you, the base quality of self-esteem believing you are a not a worthwhile person
self-righteousness	fear of being wrong or incorrect, someone else finding out you do not know something
shyness	fear of yourself
worry/anxiety	lack of faith in the future, lack of faith in past decisions, inability to face the present

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It's okay to take time to adjust, to go through the emotions as you are trying to deal with your life. The process of life is where you are at the present moment. What you are going to do with these feelings is up to you. You feel the way you feel. Then you choose how to act on the feeling by expressing the emotions or doing something about your current condition.

On the evening of Sid's death, I started a list in my mind about the "gifts" he had given me in his life. Not the tangible gifts, but the abstract ones of love, communicating, and sharing the things that really matter. The list came in between the tears, shock, and total disbelief. The next day, while flying back to Indiana, I wrote out the list, and every time I come up with another "gift" I add it to the list. This list would have never come about if it were not for his sudden death. I refused to let death take my precious memories of our times together. This list is a constant reminder and helps me keep him alive. It is an ongoing project.

I also started another list. This was done months later. It is a list of the times we did not see eye to eye. I now can look at this list and find the good in what we were really trying to tell one another. This has helped me in my communication with others. What I discovered is that it's important to tell each person what you really mean, not what you think they want to hear or play a game to get something or use them.

Give yourself the gift of tears. Cry every day you feel the pain of this loss for as long as you need.

The first time I did not cry every day was at about four months. Remember, regardless if the loss is brought about by a death of a loved one, loss of a job, or loss of a relationship, the pain is still there. I encourage you not to push it away. Just feel it, heal it, and go on.

The Golden Rule

One way for all of us to respect and honor the grief process is to remember the pain and the deep sense of loss we have experienced and to extend the considerations we would want to all others when a loss comes to them. If you know of an act of kindness you would have appreciated, please share it with someone else. With that in mind, I have included the golden rule from several holy books. Hopefully, reading these from other religions will bring an awareness of how spiritually connected all of us are, whether we attend a church, temple, synagogue, or mosque of our choice, or whether we choose not to attend.

BUDDHISM, Dhammapada: 129-130

Remember that you are like other men. As you fear and suffer, so do they. Therefore, do not do those things which will cause them trouble. As you would not harm yourself, do not harm others.

CHRISTIANITY, Matthew 7:12

Whatever you would want men to do to you, do even so unto them. One should love his neighbor as himself.

CONFUCIANISM, Shu King: 4.2..3

What one does not like to have done to himself, he should not do to others. The rule of philanthropy is to draw from one's self a parallel for the treatment of others.

JAINISM, Sutrakritanga: 1.10.1-3

One should treat all beings as he himself would be treated. Since all beings hate pain, he should kill nothing.

JUDAISM, Leviticus 19:18

What you hate do to no man. One should love his neighbors himself.

TAOISM, T'ai Shang Kan Ying P'ien

Regard your neighbor's loss as your own loss.

ISLAM, Sunna

No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.

SIOUX Prayer

Great Spirit, help me never to judge another until I have walked in their moccasins for two weeks.

Spiritual Truth:

Experience each moment of life;
do and be your best,
then there are no regrets.



Chapter 3

Guidelines for Grieving: The Year of Firsts

**“Nothing in life is to be feared.
It is only to be understood.”
Marie Curie**

Losses

The Losses in life occur one moment at a time.
Time is lost by not living in each moment.
While talking to a friend
we think about what we will say next
not listening and missing out on a shared time of joy.

While at work
we think about what we should have done at home.
Add the “doing” to the list.
Our productivity just went to the bottom!

In relationship
while talking, we don’t listen
while listening, we talk.
we express from the surface
very seldom speaking from our true feelings.

When a deep loss arrives
we regret all the moments in time lost
not saying what we really had in our hearts.

Guidelines for Grieving

1. There are no rules on “how to” experience this process.
2. “Anything goes” that will help you get through the process. My guidelines for “anything goes” are: as long as the actions, words, feelings, or thoughts are not illegal, unethical, or immoral towards myself or anyone else, go for it!
3. Be kind and good to yourself when going through it. Do not put undue pressure on yourself to perform heroic tasks during the first year of the process. If it is a holiday season and you usually send out cards but you do not feel right doing so, then do not.
4. Whoever does not support you or does not honor your requests can be replaced in your life with someone else or a support group who has similar challenges and can provide you with support.
5. Take good care of YOU! This process is an energy drain on your health. Get lots of love, rest, good food, and time to just be you. This is hard work, the hardest I have ever had to do.

A Hole in My Heart

If you've lost a loved one, you may discover how important personal memories can be. Sid and I were and always will be connected at a very deep level. Mom, Dad, and Sid came to San Diego for a visit about eleven years ago. We went to Mexico for lobster and to show Sid the sights. Sid and I both love jewelry. Our Grandpa Fambry was a silversmith. He made rings for both of his daughters that have now been passed to four generations of Fambry women. I always wanted to have rings made for all five of us to pass on and keep Grandpa alive. While in Mexico, we found a jeweler who had two very large opal rings. I bought them for Sid and me to have as brother/sister rings. I have worn my ring almost every day since. Sid wore his not as often because his hands were swollen from all the medication he had to take. Several days before he died, the back of my ring broke. One day I may have it repaired, and one day both of our rings (which I now have) will become family heirlooms passed on to nieces, nephews, and their children. But not yet.

Coping Suggestions for the Grief Process

- Make your own rules during this process.
- When you feel tired, take a nap even if it is in the middle of the day! During this process, our bodies need more energy and downtime to function.
- Give yourself the "gift" to change your mind. Postpone, change, or cancel all activities, even for the entire day, if you are not feeling up to doing what was on your schedule.
- Set limits of time and space for phone calls and visits. Do not be embarrassed about asking someone to leave.
- Each day shower or bathe, eat good food, drink lots of water, and go outside.
- Take vitamins, herbs, and minerals. Stay away from caffeine, nicotine, sugar, and alcohol.
- Do some activity that uses your hands and mind. Write in a journal or start one. Record your thoughts on the loss. Draw, do needlepoint, plant a garden, read a book to a child. Take all the pictures of your loved one and place them in a picture album. Then you can look at it when you choose and remember all of the good times.
- Each day take the time to get in touch with your emotions to know how you are feeling about the loss. Some people go to the cemetery each day. If you are not in the area, you can choose a "special place" to visit. I light a white candle to remember and feel the thoughts and emotions, as well as the good that has come to me through this loss.

Thoughts on Grief and Loss

1. Grief is like being on a wild horse not knowing where or when it will come to reclaim it's freedom. It tries to kick you if you walk along side or throw you off if you try to ride.
2. For some people, grief is uncomfortable to be in, around, or watch. It deals with the core of every person's emotions and feelings. Grief is a mirror for all of us to look into and see our unresolved, unexpressed, and unexplored parts of our past. It brings up all unresolved issues and feelings from our past toward the person we are mourning, and/or anyone else that we may have unresolved issues with.
3. Very few of us cope at a high level during this time. Some try to push the grief away, some try to handle it, some run, while others sit in the center and are kicked about. Some may choose all to get through it. Whatever way you choose to deal with it, please do work at it to get through the process. If you choose to "go on with life" and not work it through, later on down the road you will see a monster which may take

Guidelines for Grieving: The Year of Firsts

many forms arrive that is totally out of control. The monster of loss has returned for a command performance just to take away your power and control.

4. People genuinely want to comfort you. Some will say some words that are not meant to be harmful, toxic, or hurtful but the words are painful to hear. People will try to take away your emotions because they themselves cannot deal with the pain of their own losses or unresolved grief. They do not know what to do when they watch a loved one in pain.

I must share a thought with you as to how overwhelmed I was when someone told me it would be about a year before the grief would be less intense. My first response to myself was, “No way. I’ll get through this much faster!” Then I heard it from many other people. A full year was too long! I lived my life at record breaking speeds to meet all my commitments. I could not be sad and do my work. Could this just please be over? What about my clients? How long before the deep pain will be gone? Will I laugh again?

The shift came for me when I started to focus on each day, as well as being in the pain, to allow the process to heal me. When I look back at what I did, it happened in three steps:

1. Totally “letting go” of the future and the past (surrender step).
2. Trusting in my “God” to not give me anything I could not handle or was not ready for. Being open in each moment and accepting the good of what was there.

Above all else, each day I remembered: There is pain and only through it can I gain! When I was really in the pain, I would say, “Thank you Sid for this Gift, but where is the love today?” The list of special days that follows are ones that affect us all. We can choose to walk, run, or crawl through the year of firsts, dreading each one—or honoring the memories. Whichever you choose, remember the love you experienced with your loved one to help heal your pain.

The Year of First

Major Holiday of Your Belief. Do not put yourself out during this time. First of all it is difficult to want to “celebrate.” Some of the parents at Compassionate Friends suggested instead of wishing people a “Merry” or “Happy” holiday, wish them a “peaceful” time. That really made me feel a whole lot better. The thought of celebrating that time without Sid was very difficult and had much pain around it for me. He came to me in a dream and asked me to write a poem for the family. His message was to tell them about love. So, I did and gave it to them on Christmas Day along with Sid’s favorite, white candles.

Sid’s Christmas Gift

LOVE is . . .

the most wonderful, enduring, enchanting quality in our lives.

It encompasses all the Good and when practiced at its highest vibration is totally unconditional. It is an energy that flows from the Presence of Spirit, the All-giving, All-knowing, All-accepting, All-powerful, All-healing. There is nothing It is not capable of doing, changing, or completing.

It is found in every person, situation, plant, creature, and mineral. It is the energy that pushes us to grow, be happy, and enjoy life; it takes seeds into flowers, rain into rainbows, and pain into peace.

It is the only force that never lets us down.

A Hole in My Heart

It causes us to glow with a warmth from every cell, penetrates into our ego caves of darkness and denial, then melts away all our fears and blocks. It is the sunshine lighting our way, the call from a friend, or the giggle of a new baby . . . pure and innocent. It is a feeling we all share that melts the years of time away, a force that changes our minds about differences, a companion in the dark that when embraced gives us warmth and light, a joy to radiate and share. It is the language our Souls choose to communicate with, the peace we feel in our hearts and minds, the passion humans vow to live with and by in relationships, and the wisdom that defines our lives.

Its depths are unmeasurable and knowledge we can understand as only an awareness. It is always present and never fails us.

To dive in its depths is the greatest gift for one's self, to acknowledge It in All and share it with All others is your gift to the world.

In life when all else has seemingly failed, put Love into action and watch it turn your pain into
Your greatest peace.

- How did you celebrate them or choose not to before the loss? I always honored that day with a phone call to talk to Sid. My brothers, Stu and Sid, were born two years and two days apart in November. The first year after the loss was really hard. So I chose to honor Sid's day by calling my parents, writing a poem to him, having cake with my grief support group to honor him, and last but not least, spending time with my minister, Rev. Kathy Hearn. Kathy and Sid share the same birthday. So it made it much easier for me to honor both these people I love so much. You may choose all or none of these, but whatever you do, let it bring you peace and support.
- *Any "first" holiday without your loved one<D>* is a strange experience. It could be the Fourth of July, Easter, Passover, or whatever. If the loved one made a special dish or you celebrated the day in a special way, it might be helpful to do something different. Whatever you do, please do talk about the change in plans so no one is surprised or hurt by the change. Most important is to talk about the person on that day. Share your best memory of the day together. Expressing and talking heals the pain. It is okay to be sad; it is okay to laugh.
- *Mother's or Father's Day<D>* has special meaning for all of us. The first one without a child or a parent has to be filled with memories and emotions. Do something to acknowledge the day, as well as the person.
- *Yearly events<D>* that were a favorite of the person. May is race time in Indy for "the 500." We used to go as kids and teens to "the race." I was supposed to have gone back for it last year but was too burned out from my travel schedule and the death of a dear friend on the morning of my departure. This year I watched the race on TV, ate our favorite foods, and honored the times we spent at the track in the month of May.
- *Special times<D>* that were shared. Sid used to call me around midnight, West Coast time. He would just be getting home after work, wanting to talk, and I was still up. Our conversation topics ranged from life, cars, dating, and even God. I recently started dating again and wanted to call him to share with him about the new man in my life, but he is not there. So I wrote him a note to ask what he thought about this man. I am sure he heard me as I read it to him.
- *The date of the death<D>* each month. This day was very difficult to get past each month for the first few months. On a conscious level, I did not know what day it was, but my heart and body did. I would go into a dark hole each month. At the third month,

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I had to take control and to give new meaning to that date. So on the 23rd of October I started a project to change my thinking on life. I took suggestions from the writings of John Randolph Price, *The Abundance Book*<D>, to help me shift the focus from death to life. The program suggested to write for 45 days. So each day I wrote ideas on the suggested topics. The action of writing and thinking helped to decrease the pain. My focus changed, the shift occurred, and it worked! I still have the sense of loss, but it's not as penetrating.

- *Year anniversary of the death*<D>. It has been one year now. The anticipation of the day was very hard to cope with. I did not know just how to deal with this one day in time. I asked many people as to how and what they had done, if anything. My heart wanted flexibility with room to change and go where my feelings took me. My parents went to the East coast to be with my brother Stu and his wife Sonya. We all agreed that Mom deserved a special birthday this year since last year we were planning Sid's funeral on her birthday. I stayed quiet at home, lit candles, looked at pictures, and decided to tie a colored ribbon on a grapevine wreath each day of the coming year to signify and celebrate a quality of life. I had cried each day of the last, so now was the time to celebrate Life: Sid's, mine, everyone's!

The following are some very good suggestions that were offered to me to help with the first anniversary day:

1. Collect letters or comments from friends and family members about their special memories of the person and put them into a notebook. That way it will help you honor their memory, as well as give you new insights of your loved one.
2. Some people have a service and/or visit the grave site.
3. Others put sayings or thoughts of the loved one on cards and attach them to balloons and let them go.
4. Others go to a place of worship and light a candle.

Some couples I know took their child's clothes and had a quilt made to always have them near.

Whatever brings you comfort, please do that for you and your loved one. It does not have to be big, but it does bring another form of closure to the process.

The end of the first year brings still more dynamics of the grief process. It does last a lifetime. Just because the first year is completed does not mean the grief process is over or totally complete. It just means you have completed one year in time without your loved one. Some people will not give themselves permission to go on with life until this first year has been completed. Then they can start a different life. One of my friends has told me her process takes two years before she can be complete, be it a death or a divorce.

I spoke to my friend Jeff the other day and he said it had been forty years since his brother Timmy's death. This ending was one of my first major losses. I wondered if Timmy would have been a professional baseball player or just how handsome he would be as an adult. My call was to share with Jeff that I now knew what that "lost" look in his eyes was as we were growing up. It still has impact on his life. So we do carry all of our loss in our heart.

Note of Caution: Almost everyone I asked recommended that you *not change* your home, give things away, address or change money issues or investments for at least the first year. While we are in the grief process we are all extremely vulnerable. Be careful with your life, including who

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you trust with your money and what you do in your actions. Also, be cautious of new relationships of the heart. You may regret your short-term decision over the long term of your life. So, wait before taking action. Take care of you first. Then you can have a clearer head to make big decisions after the first-year anniversary.

Spiritual Truth:

Find the good in you,
in all you do,
and in all people.



Chapter 4

Change, Transition, and New Roles: What to Expect

“We are continually faced by great opportunities brilliantly disguised as insolvable problems.”

Author Unknown

Comfort Zones

Changing the evening news channel
is pushing the mark for some.
Some find it next to impossible to take this ever so small step.
It is like having a herd of elephants standing in the center of your chest!
Who would ever know
if life were to flow
it would require just a little letting go?

You could see more beauty,
experience the entire ocean in just one single drop of rain,
listen as the waves caress the beach,
feel the Sun's rays kiss your body
and the blue sky touched with puffy clouds of joy,
if you would only “let go” of the control of how life “should look and be.”

That comfort zone you inhabit
will surely take you down.
Life in the valleys always looks like struggle
but the view from the vista is always the best.
Climbing out of the zone,
you bemoan “This is more than I can bear!”

If you do not open up to embrace the pot of Gold in your rainbow
Life will be a chore but choice is yours to handle.
The formula is quite simple,
Handle one thought at a time.
Say out loud “I am thankful” at least seven times a day.
Face the ropes of fears that bind you by writing, burning, and blowing them away.
Consider yourself and all others as a blessing by being the Golden Rule
and honor your Source each day by living from your Center.

Then your comfort zone will have moved to the vista,
headed towards the mountain top.
The life you have chosen is all crafted by wise choices
from your thoughts, words, feelings, and acts.

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Now looking down into the comfort zone valley,
You see how far you have come
by choosing to be in the moment
your life is filled with love, peace, joy, and fun.

Change and loss go hand in hand. The primary issues that arise for most of us during change and loss are the unknown and fear. What is going to happen without this person, relationship, or job? What will I do now? How can I go on? What will happen next? Who will be there for me? These are very normal questions that run through our minds after what we perceive we have experienced as “a loss.”

With that in mind, here are some new perceptions on loss and change I was reminded of from my high school days in biology, chemistry, and physics. During my grieving process, these old principles of life have brought me great comfort about “endings” and change.

1. Once someone or something is in our life, they can never be lost.
2. The form may change but it is never “lost” (the person, job, relationship, etc.).
3. Everything in life has a beginning and an ending.
4. Our souls are eternal.

Change is a part of life.

Sid’s body changed form. His soul did not die. I miss his body that smiled and laughed with me. I can always talk to his soul. So the relationship is just different now; it is not over or lost. This does not mean not to grieve the change or that it is not painful or brings me great sadness, but to see the changes in life with new insights. When one can do that by living in each moment, life has new meaning. That is the gift in our grief.

Sibling Bonds

Brother, Sister, Friend.
Love, Laughter, Tears.
Talks till dawn
over pizza and beers.

Someone to share the problems and joys,
toys through fast cars
electronics and such.

Sports, dances, scouts
school, college, and careers.
Concerts, church music through rock.
It was not near enough time . . .

A life filled with hope, hospitals, and fears.
Diapers, poison ivy, playing “King of the Hill.”
Popsicle sticks, pick-up sticks, pool sticks.

Easter egg hunts, horses and skis to ride, Dad’s boat to drive
Tricycles, bicycles, and motorcycles that fly!
Births, graduations, reunions, weddings all filled with love.

Change, Transition, and New Roles: What to Expect

Through the seconds of time a bond of love was woven
From brother to sister to being best friends.
Never lost or broken only strengthened from earth to eternity.
Hugs no more now just reaching into the air.

Change is one of the most interesting and unpredictable occurrences in our daily lives. Some people thrive on it, while others are afraid of it. Some welcome it and still others dread it. For most people, dealing with change has always been a challenge and for some it only brings pain and suffering. One of the most effective ways to cope during a time of personal transition is to change your perception of what is happening. The outcome will not change, but going through the process will bring new growth and support that you could not have gained any other way.

Some examples of perceptions that I shifted were using the word change instead of loss, and finding the gift in each change. Another is to know that change is the only thing that will always be there in our lives each moment. Count on it and accept it as a major part of life.

Here are just a few examples of everyday changes in our lives of which some may not be aware: Your body is a high energy field made up of particles that are in a constant state of change. Every three years, each cell is made anew. Your fat cells fill up and empty out every three weeks. Your stomach lining is new every five days. The skin is new every five weeks and the skeleton of your body is entirely new every three months. The only memory of how something used to be is in your mind. Think about it; if you could change your thoughts in your mind about your body, the body could have a different appearance and you could feel better.

Nature is in a constant state of flux. Watch the plants to see how they will reach for the sun to grow. They turn to find the source that feeds them in their growth process. Photosynthesis is going on every moment. Humans are no different.

One of the most paradoxical issues with change is that most people's awareness and perception of change gets them "stuck" because they are resisting a very natural part of life and seeing only the pain involved. Denial is part of the cycle of grief, but if you choose to live the rest of life in it, you will miss out on so much. Change is like a river; it will keep flowing downstream with or without you. It is all your choice: it can be enjoyable, challenging, full of growth; or you can try to damn up the process, be stressed out, cut yourself off from the emotions, and not enjoy work and life. What will it be for you? Be kind to you. Do not resist "what is" about life. If you are resisting, you are wasting too much energy that could be used in a positive, productive manner to benefit all.

The dynamics of change can sometimes be overwhelming during transition from the old role to your new role. This time will require that you be able to look at yourself in a new way, be open to new ideas, heighten your awareness, have lots of courage, and develop new skills to live a different life. Your life will seem "off balance" until you can be comfortable with your new roles.

There are several steps in the change process. This process is just that . . . A PROCESS. It is ongoing. The best advice I can share with you is to: *Relax, Release and Expand!*

1. Take a realistic self assessment: Where are you now?
2. Deal with whatever the change is—grieve it, get rid of it, and get on with the new role.
3. Assess your future goals.

Take some positive action each day toward your goal.

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Like any process, it takes practice to make it work. The one thing that does not take time is the shift in your perception. That will only take one thought pattern to shift and then some positive action on your part. If you do not feel comfortable in doing a task, know that a fear and a thought are all that stands in your way of progress. Therefore, the only thing that holds you back is your thought and letting go of the fear. So go ahead and unlock the river of change.

One way to change perception is to “see” in your mind exactly what it is you want to change and how it will look after the change. When a loved one has died, all we would like is a chance to say “good-bye.” To have one last day with them and tell them all we would have said, “if only.” I went back and had one last day with Sid. I practiced a technique that has been used for many years with world-class athletes, high-volume sales professionals, and cancer patients. The technique is visualization. I went for a day visit in my mind for the “good-bye” I never got in the flesh. In Chapter VI there is an outline if you would like to try this with your loved one or for any other type of ending.

Everything we do starts with a thought about an action. Some of the thoughts are on a conscious level and others are on an subconscious level. You can change the thought or stay in the same old pattern. It is all your choice. I have some questions for you to think about: Is the current pattern of thought making life smooth or stressful? Are you ready for a change? If not now, when?

If we want to have enjoyment or peace, it can happen regardless of the outside environment. Through your eyes the situation is fine. Whatever you change on the inside will change on the outside. This is a law of physics. Change your thoughts, change your life: it is just that simple. When your brain receives a positive thought pattern, it then produces a chemical response that supports good health. That chemical is called an endorphin. These endorphins are stronger than Valium. On the other hand, when you send your body a negative message, it produces a response that does not support a healthy body. Have you noticed that when you are under the perception of great stress you will have a cold, headache, or stomach problems?

Life is a series of choices. So are the roles we live in life. You can choose what roles you will play and how you play each part. After a life-altering change, such as a death or an ending of a job or relationship, part of the process of recovery is to re-define your roles. If you have been a spouse, you are suddenly without a partner. If you were a parent, you may now be without a child, and if you were a boss, you now have no one to boss. Who are you now? What do you do now? How can you see life without being this or doing that?

On the devastating day of August 23, 1995, what I knew to be my life stopped. Prior to that day, my life had looked happy and productive. I was doing good work, valuing people as individuals, and had lots of friends. My life was all planned. Then it changed. There was something missing and it was not just Sid. When I look back to check, I’m sure it was missing all along. The “why” question never seemed to leave my mind. This was the time for me when all the old patterns of behavior, beliefs, and thoughts that were not me and my unhealthy roles went out the window. My perception was that my life had been scattered, so why not start totally over?

So I have. I took the biggest risk of my life and gave myself permission to put my life on hold, along with my business. That has caused fear in the hearts and minds of many. I looked long and hard through many tears and fears to find me. I am sure some of you can relate. The old me lived a life that I thought had depth. Being in the moment and dealing with feelings took on a whole new meaning. I was by no means “a rookie” in the life-altering change department after the deaths of my best friend, the man I loved and business associate, ten friends to AIDS, my dog Mandy, my Uncle Jake, and Sid—all in five years. During three of those five years, I held the hands of over 1,000 people who had been outplaced and spoke to well over 3,000 in résumé writing workshops who had been laid off.

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I jumped in with both feet to create the new me. First on the list to go were things and people in my life who took my energy and used me up. They got crossed off my list of "have to's." Next was doing what I thought others wanted me to do, say, and then, oh-by-the-way be! Gone! I dropped the "should's game," "blame game," being "responsible for" you and your feelings, and living in the past or the future. I now live in the moment and honor my commitments. I am responsible "for me" and "to you," and most of all, I unconditionally love me as I am, you as you are, and both of us as each is not. I now have a new life and live as the real me!

During this whole process, I did not lose faith or hope. I knew I was and am greatly loved. Now I am more open to all, trust, love, have more faith and hope, and am happier than I have ever been. My life is totally different. I have not allowed the emotions and feelings to block the grief process and stop myself from progressing beyond the pain to grow this time. Some people ask me what I am doing; my response is, "I am honoring me and doing what is best for me!" Some friends I know have resisted calling the "men in white coats" to take me away. Thank you for that!

After making all of these core changes in me and my perceptions of life, it was much easier to choose what roles to play and how to play them. You may not feel up to all of this now if you are in the first year of bereavement. Choose what best suits you, then go forward with the love in your heart and the gift from grief.

Intimacy for All

Spiritual friends are people I want
to have fun with, play, laugh, explore, and adore.
The next level is sharing thoughts, joys, dreams, and scars.
That gives me courage to just be me!
Intimate friends touch each time:
physical, mental, emotional, spiritual all being one.

Then to continue to explore each body at every level,
opening each new door,
accepting and changing whatever we find.
No expectations, blame, fault, or judgments enter in,
answers and questions when ready to share
maybe never might be your choice.
Does "never" support the intimate core?

Friendship starts with me accepting me as I am.
At each moment in time
No judgments on actions
just "being" the real me
who I am.

Then looking in the mirror
you hold for me to see
all that is about me,
Truth, beauty, and bold
myself to just be.
Only then can I honor, love, and trust
The person in the mirror to be all that you are
looking back at me.

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I give myself the things I desire
with the space to re-create myself by letting go
of hurts, pains and fears.
Each day as I shed my old thoughts, habits, and fears
I'm a new person
growing, shifting, and changing toward my real Self.
The same I give to you.
When blocks arise that take each of us from the intimate times
I accept and love both me and you
till we each find the courage to come back into that open flow
of sharing and revealing our heart's hurts of goo
and destiny's dreams.

The core of Truth has never changed
Intimacy for all allows us to grow back
to the real ones who we truly are.

Suggestions for Changing Roles

- Look at what your role in life was before the change. What responsibilities will you now have to assume? Write them down. Who can help? What skills do you need to acquire for these responsibilities?
- Look at your memories of the past. Now close your eyes and “see” yourself accomplishing these tasks. It is also good to cut out pictures of what you would like to do in your new life and glue them on a large piece of paper with a picture of you in the center of all you choose to do.

Re-defining roles at this level may not be a comfortable exercise at first, or you may want to start and do it one role at a time.

1. Write down all the titles/roles in one column and in another column, write your responsibilities/"parts" you play.

<u>Titles/roles</u>	<u>Responsibilities/"parts"</u>
Wife	open communication, love
Mother	care, feed, love

2. Review each. What roles can you change? What responsibilities will you need to assume? Ask yourself do YOU really have to do this?
3. On another sheet of paper write out your new roles and responsibilities. Add anything you would like to do that you may have waited to do, put off doing, or never tried.

Go through and cross out any responsibility you do not want to do. Give yourself permission not to do it, or choose to do it from a different perception.

“Feel It!” Exercise

This has its beginnings in the *Course in Miracles*. I developed it from the concept of finding the love in all. When emotions are running full tilt with feelings rising from loss, hopelessness, depression, or confusion about the death, change, new roles, or direction, I use this exercise. I

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sense the love in my heart and direct that warmth toward the deep pain, to the hole in my heart. One day I asked for help as to how to heal this hole and pain. "Feel the love." So, I now "see" the gift of love in whatever the challenge might be. If you cannot find love in every person or challenge, try looking for the good. Then one day you will be able to sense the love.

Spiritual Truth:

Change occurs in life for the best
by doing good deeds
and following those with good thoughts
about yourself and all others.



Chapter 5

What to Do for Healing: Re-entry into Life

**“Believing in one another moves mountains.”
Author unknown**

Hope on the Horizon

Today my heart is heavy with pain,
my eyes are filled with tears,
my body feels numb and run over by a freight train forever long.
Grief takes its toll.

As the moments grow into days,
my thoughts that came from pain
love now turns to peace,
When my ears hear words of compassion, my eyes see acts of love,
my body receives a “hug,”
my heart knows there is hope and joy will return soon.

My mind turns towards the good memories
the ones that brought laughter and smiles
They now bring a smile of hope and tears of joy.
Re-affirming that love, hope, and joy bring peace.
I can laugh without taking away mourning or dishonoring his name.

I hear my still small voice remind me
that I am loved, protected, and precious to all, especially God.
I knew that God was there all the time.
Holding me when lonely, loving me through the sadness,
chasing the dark away
and filling me full of courage to walk another day.

I can regain control of my thoughts, attitudes, and actions
when hope is in my heart.
The emotions are like the tide and still come rolling in
but not as strong to knock me down.
I can stand upright again.
I see lots of hope on the horizon, in others’ eyes
and most of all in my heart.

To honor the emotions of grief takes faith, courage, work, and love,
to go the next step in life takes hope.
Look to the horizon in your heart and find the hope you need.

Healing in this country is viewed as “give me a pill and in 60 seconds all will be fine” or “just go back to work and you will re-adjust” or you need to “keep busy.” We are fed a diet of 30- to 60-

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second sound bites on the news and then asked to make informed decisions from there. Our friends and bosses want us back to the way we were before our loss occurred. Maybe these are some of the reasons most of us shy away from the grief process. It also takes time, work, and is so very painful, not to mention, if you are wrinkle conscious, more wrinkles will come from the crying!

It is very challenging for most of us to heal when we do not even know who we truly are. I believe that this is another reason the process of physical healing takes our bodies so long to get well. From my travels to train people in all types of work environments, or in dealing with families, one thought keeps repeating itself: people see themselves as their physical body and/or as their work or career. Some are unaware that there is more to them than just their body. Some have cut themselves off from three key parts of who they are: mental, emotional, and spiritual.

They try to heal the grief cycle on a most superficial level and wonder why they are angry, stuck, judgmental, or blocked from dealing with the loss or change, and why they are not being successful.

I have talked with men who have come to S.O.S. (Survivors of Suicide) for the purpose of discussing the death of a loved one that occurred sometimes as far back as twenty-five years. They know that there is something wrong but never thought on a conscious level that it could be from a death. When asked, they thought it had been dealt with. Others say they knew it was there but did not know what or how to deal with it. The ending of life has a very profound effect on us regardless of what age it may have occurred. Some of us are just now beginning to start singing the song of change for ALL to hear, understand, and support.

In our lifetimes, we are forced to interact with many cycles. Someone once said if a person could learn and know the cycles of life, they would have a better life. I agree that if we can know the cycles of nature and apply those to our life, chances for happiness and success will go up dramatically. Life is not a linear happening like some folks believe it to be. When you choose to look at all of the cycles you are exposed to in life, you will find patterns as to how you are living your life. When you connect the physical cycle of life to the mental, to the emotional, and then to the spiritual, you will find yourself going up the Spiral of life.

The cycle of grief is with us daily, bringing all types of changes, from minimal to maximum. Another cycle that is also encircling us is growth. In all of these cycles there are phases to go through. You can choose to spend a small amount of time in each phase, or to go deeply into each one to discover the gifts they bring. Experiencing life in great depth in all four areas (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual) is my definition of success. The following are the phases of the growth cycle. Each of us goes through these five phases at various times while dealing with the four areas of life.

- Birth
- Growth—expansion, peak, decline
- Death
- Incubation
- Rebirth

Suggestions for Healing

1. Anger reduction—there are many healthy ways to let go of anger.
 - a. Take a pillow and beat it with a stick or hanger. Let it all go. This action may bring screaming and tears, or you may break the pillow.
 - b. Get into the water and put your face down in it and start to scream out the anger. Let the anger go into the water. This may also bring about tears that need to be released.Make a list of the four areas or bodies of life. Then under each area write at least three things you would like or enjoy doing to expand into your new role. Then choose one under each area and devote time to that item every day for at least 30 days.

The following chart gives examples for each of the four areas of life.

Physical	Mental	Emotional	Spiritual
Work out	Read	Express feelings	Meditate
Release weight	Daydream	Practice laughing	Pray
Massage	Private time	Cry	forgiveness

Some people turn their change into a purpose to serve other people. It is a way to keep their loved one alive and hopefully keep others from experiencing this deep pain. Some examples of this are MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Drivers), Make a Wish, Adam Walsh Foundation for lost children, and many more. I have decided to start centers in various states for people to learn how to grieve and heal; they will be called Sid's Ranch. These will be places where people of all ages can come to learn how special they are, to be cared for and learn how to heal and how to communicate with others, both personally and professionally. Family was very important to Sid. He helped many of his friends' children find their way after tragic changes in their young lives.

Hurts and Fears

Hurts and insecurities bring us pain.
With enough time we forget their names
then on into fears they grow
and we pretend the hurt was not there.
The fears protect us from all the pain and tears
that now surround our childhood wounds.
As we grow older,
we push them down and away
ignoring the inner promptings that will come back for a visit one fine day.

As a child, our hurts were not acknowledged
for how deep they really went.
To cry and feel them
makes us weak
so instead we dishonored the pain and put them to bed.

But all along the way
the child inside us cries from the pain,
only wanting to be acknowledged, valued, accepted, and loved
not for what happened

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but for who we are:
creative, wise, loving, and innocent.

Without this understanding from adults along our way,
the little one inside us is "terrified" to play.
So up go the blocks of protection
then come doubts of self and others
so no trust will ever be found.
Eroding self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-love
replaced by looming doubts.
"I cannot do that . . . !" "No way will that work!" "Why me?"
Our ego sings the song of unworthiness that keeps us down.
The childhood dreams of success and a life filled with joy
look totally different from the valley of hurts and fears.

Some of us were raised to have "all the right stuff"
to grin and bear it, be ever so tuff!
Well guess what hits long about middle age?

The crisis of self-reliance, success, and pushing hurts away
finally caught-up and demand attention,
now it is their feeling day!
All of the fame, possessions, and money cannot push this one away.

The one thing we all want and need
is calling to us "be accountable for all those inner fears."
They are not visible on the surface but hidden so deep inside.
These old hurts have caused the mightiest to tumble
while the ego runs out of control.
Where did this block come from? Why can I not go on?
Which fears are controlling me?
How much longer will relationships and joy elude me?
These are questions that have haunted us each day
but we never took the time
to find the answers,
heal the hurts inside we pushed down so deep.

My advice is simple but not always easy to do.
Stop running, sit still and uncover your pains.
Each time you sense resistance
be open to which fear lurks in the shadows of your subconscious.
Judging self and others only feeds the fear power,
then we are stopped in our tracks!
Quick change your thought about what is happening
take a breath and move on.

In each fear is the gift of unconditional love and acceptance
to help heal your wounds from the past.
You have searched on the outside and blamed everything and everyone,
for answers to stop these pains.
Stop looking outside of you
for no other person can help you heal.

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The love they give you will never be quite enough.
Your need is to accept and love you
for all that you are and are not,
so give to yourself the gift of unconditional love
start living right where you are!

Reclaim the child inside!
See your dreams come back alive
from the courage
you find to heal inside.

Things that Have Helped Me Heal

1. Spiritual practice
2. Friends: cards for the first year, calls, gifts, time, and understanding
3. Space
4. Meeting new people with similar challenges
5. Getting away from routine, taking a vacation
6. Swimming, walks on the beach, or nature
7. Counseling sessions
8. Writing: daily journal, letters, poems, and this book
9. Sleep, healthy food, exercise, vitamins and herbs
10. Reading: books on death, grief, and self help
11. Rental videos or movies
12. Special treats: massage, mud baths, mineral waters, Jacuzzi
13. Not being over-committed
14. Permission to say "No," even to a client
15. Private times—turn off the phones and let the machine answer all calls
16. Support group meetings—weekly, then a few times a month
17. Classes on getting through the holidays
18. A 3x5 card with three key activities to do each day to be healthy
19. Knowing I have friends to call 24 hours a day
20. Encouragement from clients and friends to heal and finish writing
21. Neighbors making food, planting the flowers, and checking on me
22. Socializing on a limited basis
23. Dating again
24. Cleaning my mind, then my closets, drawers, and house
25. Rebirthing, toning voice sounds
26. Sitting in the sun
27. Talking with teens and children
28. Drawing with crayons and pencils
29. Attending workshops on growth, grief, and healing
30. Hospice program on getting through the holidays
31. Lighting candles
32. Laughter (this took a while)
33. Sitting in the quiet
34. Water therapy—screaming and crying in the water

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Re-entry into life after a devastating change needs to be taken slowly. You will not be able to go at your old pace for a while or maybe never. Again, in the beginning of the grief cycle, the pain is most intense. As you feel the pain and do the work, the grief is not as intense. One thing that I have learned is that what I thought was so very important before is not now. In society today we have more reasons for running away from what is really important. In the “doing” of life, sometimes we make the pain worse. Some of us run because we do not want to look at ourselves. We may not like what we find. Sit and be still. You will be pleasantly surprised and mostly like what you find. If not, you can choose to change it. It is all a choice as to what to do or not do. So maybe you just might choose to cross off some of the idle chores you did before, to come to a realization of what is real for you now.

The Sadness Scale is a way to track where you are in the process of grief. The top of the scale is ten (saddest) with one being the least sad. There were days in the first few months that I knew I must be at 15. Writing down where I was in my daily journal gave me a baseline. When I had a 10 and was feeling bad, I only had to look back to see that there had been days when the wave of grief had not wiped me out. As the months go by, I still have times and days that call me back to the sadness. That is just a part of life.

A good friend from Compassionate Friends and I were talking about healing. It had been three years since her daughter's death. She said she now knows she has a choice as to what type of day she will have: a good one, or one where she needs to be sad. Others are sad each day, even after ten years. It is their choice.

One day while Sid and I were growing up, he found a gray dove in the back yard with a broken wing. We worked on the dove to set its wing. We fed him and hoped he would heal. After a time, the dove was well enough to fly, so Sid let the dove go as I watched it fly away. Doves have always meant a lot to the two of us. On the night of Sid's death, I cried for a sign that he was okay and at peace. The next day before I left for the airport, a dove came to my patio in San Diego and sang to me. While I was locking up, I found a very small feather on my patio, stuck in an odd place. When I got to Indiana, I was in total shock; part of me did not want to believe that this was all true. I was crying and did not want to upset my parents, so I sat on the front porch to do some more asking. There was another small gray feather beneath my feet! Then, on the day we were all leaving to go home, we went to Sid's house first. I decided to walk around his house one last time to enjoy the yard, smell the roses, and sense him there. I was really torn between going back to San Diego and staying in Indy to help my parents. I was wearing Sid's down vest to keep him close to me, so I could hold on to him. And there in front of me was a big, white, square-ended feather. When I bent over to pick it up, I heard these words, “Sis, I am well, at peace, and will now comfort you. Go home and love your life like you taught me.” So I did.

Spiritual Truth:

“Sometime, somewhere, you take something to be truth.
If you cling to it so much,
when the real truth comes in person and knocks at your door,
you will not open it.”
Buddhist folk tale



Chapter 6

Myths, Poems, and Meditations

“The secret cause of all suffering is mortality itself, which is the prime condition of life. It cannot be denied if life is to be affirmed.”
Joseph Campbell

Life, Love, and Loss

Life is a great mystery
to be lived on many levels,
to embrace, explore, enjoy, and expand.

Enjoyment comes from embracing Love and Loss
for without both we would not be living.

In each day,
we can see Love in each person,
cope with the bitterness of loss
to then have the sweetness of life that matters.

Myths play a vital part in our lives. They give us context to tell us about the great stories of life. But there are some myths that keep grief in the closet for most Americans. When our ancestors came to this country, they brought with them rituals and customs from their home countries. Therefore, we have seen many ways to bury and grieve our ancestors' passings. There are several myths I will address with the purpose of shifting perceptions and bringing truth to light.

The first one: “Time heals all.” Sorry; that one is not true. The only thing time does is pass. It does nothing else. Knowing, working, and doing the process of grieving will heal the past, not time.

Number two: “It is not acceptable to cry, especially for males.” Can we please bury this one? Can we all just be open and feel our emotions? I hereby give all men and boys of all ages permission to cry and show their emotions in an appropriate manner. Another part of this one is: “If they do cry, it must be in private, and for sure, no sobbing.” For those who have a challenge watching men cry, I suggest you get comfortable with your tears and fears before you judge them. How many more heart attacks are the males of this society going to have before they wake up and realize they need to start expressing their feelings?

Number three: “This death or ending does not affect me and grief cannot hurt me.” Well, that is a real old one, but it still exists in the minds of most folks today. A death report in London in 1657 listed as causes of death: Small Pox—835, Plague—446, Grief—10. Even that far back, they knew that a person could die from unexpressed, unresolved, and unexplored grief. How far have you come in your thoughts?

A Hole in My Heart

Number four: “If you cannot handle your own problems or responsibilities, you are weak and can be replaced.” I would like to invite any head of a company or organization to bring this into a different perception in the workplace. Unresolved, unexplored, and unexpressed grief is one of the major causes of low productivity today. Many people are in great pain over the loss of their jobs or the deaths of their loved ones. Two or three days is just not long enough for bereavement leave.

If Corporate America really wanted to boost the bottom line, they would create a safe space for support and grief in the business world, allay workers’ fears about losing their jobs, and put their most precious resource—people—first, not last.

Cardiovascular disease, the number one cause of death in this country, claimed 954,138 lives in 1993. In the second quarter of 1995, 1,670 companies participated in mass lay-offs of over 385,644 people. Corporations are not far behind heart disease in “killing off” the career life. The practice of hiring with little consciousness and then laying off workers to boost the bottom line—with no regard or responsibility to the people involved—needs a re-think. This kind of corporate behavior is not sending a supportive message to the youth or the masses of this country. Could the executive’s bonuses be shared instead of laying off workers? Could the hiring managers be more honest or precise about the workload? Could we all work at a much higher level if we were not pushing our feelings away? How can executives expect the line people—whose lives are already out of balance from working long hours—not to be feeling a deep sense of pain and most of all betrayed when their jobs are terminated? Corporations have single-handedly scattered more dreams of careers, families, educations, futures, and retirements than any one single disease currently taking life in our country. Don’t you think it is time to change our perceptions on expressing our grief over the changes in our lives and world?

Number five is a very personal one: “Suicide is the responsibility of the family.” Well, I am here to tell you this: *No one* can be responsible for anyone else. Each person has total responsibility for their own actions, words, thoughts, and feelings on some level. If you think that you can control someone else, you had better take a long, hard look at just where you are out of control.

The poems in this section and throughout the book have been written especially for the process of grief. Each one calls to mind a segment of what we all need to get through the process and to come out healed on the other side. They were written from my heart to yours. I hope they bring comfort and speak to you.

Pearls of Relationships

Relationships are the fiber of life.
They can be with family, young and old, male and female, self and God.
Each one is very special
regardless if it is old or new.

The moments together are like precious pearls
on a golden strand of time.
These pearls touch us deeply,
They are gifts from one soul to another.
When looking into the eyes of the pearl giver,
You can truly see a mirror of all the good you are
especially when the pearl is surrounded with love from their Center.

Relationships may come and go.
Your pearls of relationship may be few
or you may have many strands from far and wide.

This precious gift of love and memory will always be in your heart.
It eternally surrounds your soul and reminds you of all the joy that loving brings.

So honor the pearls of relationship with each moment in time.
Know you have been blessed from the Spirit that is in us all
and treasure your pearls in this life.

The River of God's Love

This river of love flows through each of us
to support, nurture, and refresh.
Some choose to stand on the rocks
Others choose to run from the pain.
I stand in the center of this river
knowing there is the changeless about me
that never dies: love, faith, hope, and courage.

My body at times has been bloody
from being thrown on the rocks of life
sometimes leaving open gashing wounds
arising from the challenges of
living life without love.

Searching outside the river for relief
I took my body out of this love
to find peace and joy.
Instead I found myself being
flung between the rocks and shore.
The river kept calling me back,
"come to me for love and peace."

Inside my Soul I knew this was true,
So I stand tall shining anew for
all to see the God in me.

One day, I've been told,
God will send a man of Gold
who will know his truth,
match my light and both will shine
each as an individual light.
Honoring God, Self, and both.
Each to teach, love, and play.

The essence of God is planted within each of us
for all eyes to behold,
to unfold with care, knowing that the tender touches are magic,
the kisses Divine
so natural like breathing.

To be in one another's presence is a gentle peace.
First at each one's center is the Deep Love of God.
Then the Self as God's light to shine, share, and be.
Next comes the other, the mirror of God's Love

A Hole in My Heart

Seeing all that each is as the Inner Beauty shines forth.
Knowing the truth
that each "Precious One" brings lessons to share.
On the surface we both asked for a date.

Someone to explore, grow, laugh, and have fun.
On a deeper level, you asked for a Spiritual teacher,
I asked for the equal to my Light,
both to be, know, share, and honor the light in each.

As we go along on our journey exploring one another's life,
The Spirit that brought us together has a Divine Plan.
Its depth and reasons of simplicity we do not consciously know.
I accept whatever they might be and relax in the flow
knowing the gift of the experience will take us to the next level of thought then life.

I only know my "Sweetheart's" words are healing to my ears.
His touch in the river of love is soft, caring, and dear.
His Soul speaks volumes to mine at a level so deep and true.
His thoughts are pure, loving, and kind always for the good of all.
His words of life are simple but Divine.

I trust that we were "One,"
crafted by God's hands,
parted long ago to now find each other in this place and time.
To be the highest, explore the depths of this river,
hold each other during the storms, share the joys of nature,
Be warmed by one another's Sun,
as we stand together in the River of God's Love expressing all we are.

Trust

The first step in trusting is the letting go
the next step is total surrender
then watch the gifts flow.

You will find yourself so very blessed
from the letting go.
Your life will look so different
you won't even begin to know.

It starts by letting go of your breath
then breathe in your oneness with God.
Next release your little thoughts
replace them with loving thoughts of good.

Listen to your inner guidance
all the fears will soon be gone.
You see in your mind
the joy from your heart
the form takes on God's love
and your trust will build a little deeper in Self and God.

Soon love is all there is and trusting is returned.

Trust is the light of God
that builds bridges of faith to support us,
it knocks the blocks of fear away,
gives us freedom to be our True Self
and love to share with all!

It starts when we were children.
For that is all we knew.
Love and trust are who we were.
Where did they go?

This last section on meditation is one that I hope will bring you great peace and much healing. Meditation, which is called by many names, from contemplation through quiet time, is a gift you give to yourself to find the peace within you. It is a spiritual practice that has great significance to many people. It keeps me centered and connected to my Spirit. It has also increased my ability to focus and concentrate. The time I spend doing this practice is the best time of my day. Some say to practice two times a day for twenty to thirty minutes. Others say once a day for fifteen. I suggest that you try to clear your mind for ten minutes to start each day and see where you go from there. Whatever time you take will be filled with many benefits.

Starting this practice is a challenge for some and very simple for others. The goal is what you set for yourself. If you hear “mind chatter,” ask the thoughts to leave for a time. They will come back. Some choose to see their thoughts as clouds floating by. Others see them as leaves on a stream flowing by. Find what works for you. This is the one time to be focused on nothing. Clear your mind to receive. If you fall asleep, that is fine. Whatever happens is what is to be for you. Just continue practicing, for that is what it takes to be successful. When you feel like you want to stop, do not, for that is when the breakthrough will occur.

Meditation has been taught to help lower blood pressure, reduce stress, give you more energy when tired, help heal the body, and keep you relaxed. When I meditate for thirty minutes I feel like I have rested for eight hours.

For all meditation time, choose a place that is quiet and where you will not be disturbed. You can sit in a chair, lie on the floor, sit on a pillow, or whatever feels most comfortable, with your back and neck supported. Start by taking a series of deep, relaxing breaths. Breathe in from the center of your stomach. Then exhale all the way. The deeper you can inhale and exhale, the more relaxed you will become. As you start the breathing process, let your mind clear of all thoughts. Then you are ready to focus on the quiet. Choose which of the following meditations you would like to do or just sit in the space of peace to receive and listen.

The Spiral of Life - A Meditation on Love Within

God's Name is in my Heart,
carved in the core and fiber of who I AM.
The “O” in God is the circle of Love placed deep
to always remind me of how I AM Love.
This unbroken symbol is crafted from the purest of metals.
Half is Gold the other half Silver.
When I remain as I AM,
living from my Real Self of who I AM
both shine ever so bright as the stars at night.

A Hole in My Heart

When I slide down the Spiral into the physical life
sometimes I forget and pick up thoughts that are not True for me.
So my circle of love turns to tarnish from those doubts and fears.
My question in Life “what pieces of thought are really not mine?”

So sit and reflect deep from inside.
Breathe in the Truth of you, and then let go with a big sigh, all that is not you.
Allow each to come into mind.
The thoughts of Shame for not being Perfect?
The misperceptions of being Unlovable?
The feelings of not being Worthy to Live?

As these lessons of thorns float to the top,
see the picture in your mind and the memories they bring
Who said what or did acts to you that reinforced the un-Divineness in you.
Look instead to the Good of each thorn, find the Truth of who you are.
Honor each one by breathing in from your True core.

Now choose if you like, the Pure Cloth of Truth.
See yourself polishing away and letting go of each thorn.
When you let go of the thorn, pick up the White Lily of Truth.
You know the I AM at your core is Precious for that is what makes you BE You.

See your circle of Love expanding and glowing as a bright Light.
It was placed there filled with the I AM to insure your High Quality of Life.
Look for a moment and reflect on each Lily of Your Truth.

The Wholeness that your Circle of Life contains:
Love, Peace, Joy, and Power never to change.
Even more is the Abundance of All seen through Beauty and Order.
Balance it All and you will find the Freedom to Fly.
Inner woven is the Courage to try.
Wisdom to Guide you and Faith to remember when your Path seems lost.
Unity within the moment as well as with each living thing.

As you glow from these moments of remembering the I AM in you,
Place your hands over your Heart.
Accept this for you with warmth, humility, and Joy.
See yourself radiating the same to All those you know,
especially those in the pain of not remembering their Truth.
Then broaden your Circle of I AM.
See our world All a-Glow.
Perfect as IT was created, now fill it full of Love.

Go now to Live Who you are, BE Who You Are, and Love Who You Are, The I AM within.
Now Fly back up the Spiral of Your Life to Shine So Bright, Being God's Light.

Forgiveness Meditation

This one is a modified version of the Tibetan Buddhist meditation called *Tonglen*. *Tonglen* is practiced every day by his Holiness, the Dalai Lama to bring healing through forgiveness to our world. I used this one with my brothers and parents the first night we were together after Sid's death. It really helped us start to heal. I use a tape, “Menders of the Heart,” by the group Crimson. Their music is so very healing and relaxing.

Find your place and get comfortable. Start the breathing process and as you do, “see” in your mind’s eye the Sun shining directly over your head. Feel it warming your body. “See” its golden glow. Sense your body becoming more relaxed from the energy of the Sun. Allow all of your concerns to float away as you continue to breathe. Breathe in the warmth of the Sun and let go of your concerns. Allow your body to be healed by the rays of golden light and the warmth.

Step One

1. Bring into your mind’s eye an image of yourself, sitting in front of you. “See” yourself as you are right now. Look deep into your heart. What is it saying to you? Where is your pain? What do you need to forgive yourself for? Listen and you will hear. Then forgive yourself for whatever.
2. See a circle of love going from your heart to the heart of you sitting in front of you. As you breathe in the love from the Sun into your heart, send the love and forgiveness to you sitting in front of you. As you exhale, let go of the thoughts that need forgiveness (hurt, anger, fear, judgments, etc.) and any pain you feel.
3. Now see the love energy flowing from your heart to the other heart. Feel the sense of peace and love.
4. Send a special message of love to you and send you on your way filled with love and peace, now totally forgiven. “Thank you” for being you.

Step Two

5. Now choose your parents (one or both) or a family member. Repeat 1-4 with them.
6. Bring into your mind’s eye one or both of your parents. Sit them in front of you. See them as they are now or how you remember them to be. Look deep into their heart(s). What is it saying to you? What do you need to forgive them for? Where is the pain? Listen and you will hear. Then forgive them for whatever it is.
7. See a circle of love going from your heart to the heart of the one(s) sitting in front of you. As you breathe in the love from the Sun into your heart, send the love and forgiveness to the one(s) sitting in front of you. As you exhale, let go of all thoughts that need forgiveness (hurt, anger, fear, judgments, etc.) and any pain felt.
8. Now see the love energy flowing from your heart to the other(s’) heart(s). Feel the sense of peace and love.
9. Send a special message of love to the one(s) before you and send them on their way, filled with love and peace, now totally forgiven. Thank them for being in your life.

Step Three

Now choose your spouse, partner, special friend. Repeat 1-4 with them.

Step Four

Now choose your child, a friend, or your inner child. Repeat 1-4 with them.

Step Five

Now choose someone at work. Repeat 1-4 with them.

A Hole in My Heart

Step Six

Now choose someone or someplace in the world that you know needs support. Repeat 1-4 with them.

Step Seven

Now sense the good you have done for yourself and the world. Feel all the love, peace, and forgiveness. Rest in that place of love and breathe in all that is there for you. Place these feelings in each cell in your body. Thank yourself for helping to heal our world.

When you are ready, slowly allow yourself to come back into your body and the place where you are resting. You might want to wriggle your toes and start to feel your body again. Then you can open your eyes. Take this sense of love and peace wherever you go.

Forgiveness Practices

The practice of forgiveness is very simple but not always easy to do. Here are the steps I follow in my forgiveness routine.

1

1. Forgive myself first, for all that I am and all that I am not, my actions, words, thoughts, feelings, judgments, and resentments towards myself and all others.
2. Forgive all others for their actions, words, thoughts, feelings, judgments, and resentments.
3. Forgive myself for not being all I want to be or do.
4. Forgive all others for not being all that I want them to be or do.

There you have it. Practice it daily and your world will really change—all for the better!

Note: You do not have to forgive the action, just the person. Separate the person from the action.

One More Day . . .

This meditation is to add closure to the death of a loved one (person or pet) or any type of ending (job, relationship). This has been very successful for me to say “good-bye” and do the things with Sid I didn’t have time to do. Hope you find whatever it is you need for closure. If you like, you can do it more than once. If you forget something, that is okay. To help organize your thoughts, write out what you want to say first. If you do not follow what you wrote, that is perfectly fine. Whatever you said needed to be said for completion. Do not be concerned.

1. Choose a death or an ending you want to have closure on.
2. In detail, write out where you would go for your last day.
3. Continue writing on what you want to do.
4. Next, write what you want to say.
5. Write what you need to hear them tell you.
6. Write out your “good-bye.”

Now you are ready to go into meditation. Locate a spot, get comfortable, and start deep breathing. You can now start down the list you have just written, only this time it is in your mind. Use all of your senses to make it come alive. See all the colors, smells, listen for music, bells, the wind, touch their hands, and sense the feelings between the both of you. As they or you turn to leave, be still and deal with the feelings and let them flow. Keep breathing, and when you are ready come back into your body, move your body before you open your eyes. Slowly come back, then open your eyes.

Closure is a very powerful tool, especially with a sudden change. You can use this technique over and over until you sense complete closure.

“Love It!”

This is really more of an exercise or practice than a meditation. It can be done while meditating, but I like to do it whenever I am faced with a challenge. This has brought peace to situations that did not look like there could ever be any, and calm to the center of “storms.” It is very easy to do. The only trick is remembering to do it!

1. To the person, thing, or situation you are having a challenge with, “see” a circle around them.
2. In the circle, find the good in the person or challenge. There has to be some good in every person. I do know sometimes that is the hardest thing to do. Remove your judgments from the challenge. This is the time to learn to separate the person from the action.
3. Once you have found the good, you can look for the love. Yes, it is there; just look harder. A line from the Course in Miracles, “I can choose to be peace or to be right.” What will you choose?

Spiritual Truth:

Your True Self, the Soul and Spirit of you,
was never born and will never die.



Chapter 7

For the Supporter

**“If I can stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain.”
Emily Dickinson**

Sid's Gift from the Other Side

Down the road of life, I see you up ahead
Greeting me, encouraging me to keep going.
You are so radiant with love all around you.
Lighting my way, standing by me each day,
Showing me the way.

You say to “Be Strong,”
for our love flows between us and is always present.
The best gift for you this day is for me to
Accept your Love that lights my way,
“Carry on but Feel the pain turning it into Peace!”
“Share our love” with all I meet,
and “Be Happy” for our roads still are inner-twined
with all there was before,
just different now . . . You are there in my heart.

My supporters lined up to do anything and everything. Paula Brandes, who found Rev. Kathy, took me to and from the airport and started calling friends to lend their prayers of love and support. My neighbor Anna heard me crying and came to check on me. My other neighbors, Dave, Chris, and Catie who watched over me with food, flowers, and talks. My friend Cel Davis who is always a phone call or thought away with compassionate words. Thank God for supporters.

Helping a friend or relative or co-worker cope with the changes that loss brings is not easy. I've included these special suggestions, drawn from my own experiences and the experiences of others, to make it easier for you to be what you most wish to be: supportive.

There are four points to remember:

1. The period of adjustment into a new role after your life has been irrevocably changed by the loss of a loved one is very different for each person. But whether we all want to face it or not, it really takes a lifetime to adjust. So, if you have a friend, next door neighbor, family member, person at work, or whoever just happens to be riding the “wild horse of grief,” go very easy on them. Be sensitive before you open your mouth to share kind words. Look deeply into their eyes to see if the “happy mask” is on.

Note: Do not tell someone to “get on with their life” after a few weeks or months. It just will not happen, and most of all you may lose a friend. WE may look like we are getting on with our lives, but we are only going through the motions.

A Hole in My Heart

2. Every person handles their grief horse very differently. Their feelings are sitting at the top, with no cover to protect them from the raw exposure to life. These feelings are then expressed as bottled-up emotions and sometimes are unrecognizable as normal reactions to the everyday details of life. Getting out of bed, fixing food, talking on the phone, all take energy that the grieving person just does not have.
3. What not to say is so very important to the recovery process. If you cannot think of a supportive statement, do not say anything. One of the most supportive and healing statements is: "I am here for you . . . what can I do?" Saying nothing is also healthy. Then just be there for that person any time, day or night, without judgments or agendas. This is not the time to get your needs met.

Knowing you are thought about, cared about, and loved brings great comfort and support. Fears come up about being forgotten while you're mourning.

Friends

Friends come in all shapes, sizes, and descriptions as well as colors, sexes, cultures and ages.

You may have known them forever or just for a little while, but they are there for you. Filled of the spirit of God. They listen with ears of love, hearts filled with compassion, eyes beholding shock, a mind filled with your truth, offering only their arms of support to hug your weary body. Their only concern is to support you in golden arms of love.

They listen with the heart of God, the wisdom of Solomon, the patience of Job, and the support of Buddha. They surround you with all the love and compassion they can muster and know in their hearts that there but for the grace of God go I . . .

They do not give advice or judge, they just listen and listen, time and again to help you walk through this season of deep pain. They can see the large hole in your heart but they listen anyway. No words of advice just ears and arms of love. They do not try to fix you, they just accept you as you are . . . tears, pain, fear, and all!

Some are like rocks for you to lay your wounded body down on. Others are like water that rinses your wounds for healing by their words of compassion and still others hold your hand to walk alongside when your body trembles. God surely sent these earthly angels to me . . . the greatest gift of all is a "friend."

Things NOT to Say or Do

I do realize that what comes out of our mouths at the time when we want to be supportive is from being unaware of what is the most supportive. Be very careful what you say to someone who is in grief. We all mean well, and the last thing we would want to do is harm the person we care about by saying something that is insensitive. Before you open your mouth, please put aside your judgments, feelings, and beliefs about the person or what happened. Do not make any comments based on your religious beliefs. And this is not a time to be recruiting for a religion.

- *"Get on with life." "Enjoy the day." "You can have better days if you choose." "This really can't be the worst thing that has happened to you."*

These are just a few thoughts that were shared and meant no harm, but are very harmful to the ears and heart of the person hearing them. These words and others like them invalidate the mourner's feeling of loss, hopelessness, and great sadness.

- *"I know how you feel."*

No way could any person be able to "feel" the same way another person feels. Loss is so personal and individual that it would be impossible to be experiencing the exact same feelings as another person. One kind lady said those words to me. I asked her if her dad had killed himself. She said, "Oh, no; he died of cancer." Somehow comparing a dad vs. a brother and an expected death vs. a sudden one has very little validity.

- *"Your loved one is in a better place." "Your loved one is no longer suffering." "I am sorry for your loss."*

Some people do not see the end of life as a loss but as a change in life and not a loss. Some do not believe there is a better place. Some feel that suffering is an honor.

Do not say anything that focuses on your belief system (positive or negative), even if you both are of the same religion. For example, do not in any of these instances say:

Suicide

- *"_____ will be in hell now because of this action."*

Someone actually said this to me. I was thrown back into shock and so hurt by this remark. It made me feel the pain and loss all over again.

AIDS

- *"This is God's way of cleaning; they deserve to die".*

Yes, someone said those words to me after a friend had passed on from AIDS. Please separate the person and loss from the reason for the death.

A child has died

- *"You have been blessed with other children . . . "*

So what? Each child is a precious being. No one can replace or take the place of the child who has died.

A parent . . .

- *"I hope you feel better after this long illness." "Your parent lived a good, long life."*

What does feeling better have to do with the loss? Maybe we wanted them forever.

A spouse . . .

- *"You had a number of wonderful years with _____. You can always remarry."*

The dreams the couple had together will never be completed. If there were children, each will now be without that parent for love, support, and all that a parent does.

DO NOT:

- Stay a long time when visiting the home of the grieving person. Fifteen minutes will be long enough.

A Hole in My Heart

Do not expect a lot from that person. Do not try to use guilt, manipulate, or shame them into doing anything. If you have a need or agenda, do not ask this person. That behavior is way overwhelming for them. They have nothing to give. They need your love and support.

Things TO Say

Unfortunately, there are no magic words to say to take someone's pain away. That is not our role as a friend or supporter. Our role is to just be there. This is the best and most compassionate thing to say or do: just let the person know you care and are there for them any time, day or night.

1. Bring up the death. It is very hard on us to start the conversation about our loved one. Please talk with us about what happened and how we feel. Honor sadness. It is not contagious.
2. Very gently, with deep compassion, love these wounded souls back into life.

TO DO:

1. Give the person(s) the "gift" of compassion. Make sure it is from their perception of what would really support them. Some people may not know what they need. The most comforting "gifts" are the very small things that are day-to-day tasks when they have no energy to do them—anything from taking out the trash to meals prepared and ready to eat. Remember, most people want to stay at home. It is safe there and they can feel their emotions without embarrassment.
2. Make food and bring it to the person's home. Even do this weeks or months after the loss has occurred. My friend Pam and her daughter Kim did this for my family. It was the best gift they could have given us.
3. Go to the market for them and then deliver the food to their home.
4. Do errands for the person or family.
5. Where there are children, please do something to comfort *each* child. Talk to them about how they are feeling. Ask what they would like to do or how they would like to remember their loved one. They are having similar feelings as adults. Each child really does need to express, in a healthy way, what is being felt. They need to be reassured about security and love. Answer all of their questions. Do not make up things to comfort them. Do not leave them out of the ceremony or grieving process. They are afraid of what is happening just because we adults overlook them. They get mixed messages and perceptions that they are not okay if they are left out.

A man I know from Survivors of Suicide (S.O.S.) was five when his father died. He was kept at home and not included in his father's funeral. He still wonders what he did wrong not to be asked to be there so he could say "good-bye." The day of Sid's funeral, I took my nephew, Austin age 7, out for a walk around the mortuary to explain what would happen in the next few hours. I asked if he had ridden in a limo before. So we went to meet the driver and see the limo. He asked how Uncle Sid was getting to the cemetery. So, we looked at the hearse. He then asked how Uncle Sid's body was getting in the car. I explained to him that Uncles Stu and Steve, along with close friends and his dad, would carry Uncle Sid's coffin. Austin said he was strong and could help carry his Uncle Sid. Dad agreed and Austin helped carry his Uncle Sid. He was so happy and honored to have done his "part" and be included in the process.

6. One thing that would be supportive for a person in mourning is to receive cards each week or month for the first year. In the card, tell them what day you will call to have a phone visit and to make plans. Then follow up on that day and time. This allows the person to prepare and say yes or no to an outing.

Another way of caring for the person is to call. I have friends who called me weekly during the first year: Mary Bittlemeier, Barry Hall, Jorge Torres, and Dave Dartez. Carol Fiechtl has called and sent cards during this first year with messages of love and cartoons to make me smile. Each card arrived on a down day and brought me joy. Many families and teenagers from my church have sent cards and called. My “angels” from the law enforcement community are Ann, Chuck, Joe, and Tom. They have called and watched over me.

7. Sharing your memories of our loved ones helps to stabilize us. We would really appreciate it if you would take the time to write out what you know, did, or laughed and cried over with our loved one. Please share these cherished memories with us. This keeps us going and keeps our loved one alive. This act only takes a few minutes and brings us great love and comfort.

Spiritual Truth:

There is always more than enough of everything you need in life.
Take time to give of yourself.