

The LIGHTHOUSE



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Reflections

Walking on Mossy Bank this morning as I breathed in the tangy brisk air, I noted signs of fall everywhere. Splashed along the roadside were bands of golden rod and wild purple asters. The orange maple tree caught early sun in a blaze of glory. I returned home refreshed.

Autumn is a nostalgic time of the year when we look back on summer adventures. Topping my list of memories was traveling to Detroit with my son Rick for the BDSRA Conference. In my mind is a picture of parents gathered in a circle in an upstairs Conference room, to help each other heal. We shared our stories, some very recent in the loss of a child to Batten disease. I was impressed with the honesty:

- anger at the unfairness
- question- “Where is God in this terrible pain?”
- gratitude for what we have learned from our children
- ways of coping in the midst of stress.

Rick and I came away in awe of the courage we witnessed as mothers and fathers face their tremendous loss.

Especially meaningful was the memorial service on Sunday. Through a stirring message from the pastor, lighting candles for each child now with God, and the gift of flower and glass angels, we parents shared our sadness. One song “Angels In Waiting” especially spoke to Rick and me.

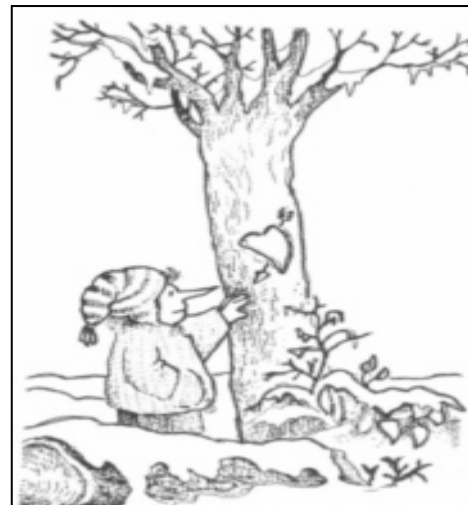
Many at the conference shared with me the comfort that reading The Lighthouse brought to them. This Fall 2003 edition is chock full of inspiration and information that will guide you along your journey of mourning. There’s also an interview with Edie Docktor that reveals the redemptive power of grief to help you reach out to those who are hurting. I hope you discover a gem that will touch your heart.

Connie Jackson, editor

Wishing you peaceful holidays.....

BDSRA

Give yourself time to grieve. It may take several years just to accept the finality of a loss, that someone is gone forever, and even more to work through your emotions.



I don’t know how many people believe in angels, but I do. I consider myself lucky to have two very special angels who watch over me everyday. They are my brothers, Alan and Shawn, who passed away with Cystic Fibrosis. They were my biggest fans, and my greatest heroes. That’s why this song is so close to my heart.

I tried for a year and a half to write, this song, but it was so emotional, I just couldn’t seem to make it through. Till one day, I sat down with the two very talented and very kind men. Jim Mc Bride and Stewart Harris, and we wrote “Angels In Waiting.”

My brother Alan told me once, he said, “I’m not going to be here very long, so if you could just live enough for the both of us. That would make it okay.” That is something I carry with me everyday. That’s why this song is the last one on the album, which is dedicated to my brothers, Alan and Shawn.

They are my angels in waiting.
Continued on next page ...

Angels In Waiting

**WE CAMPED OUT ON THE LIVIN' ROOM FLOOR
IN OUR OLD SLEEPIN BAGS BY A MAKE
BELIEVE FIRE
IN A TENT MADE OF COVERS
WE'D TALK FOR HOURS
MY TWO BORTHERS AND ME KEEPIN' THE
FAITH
RACING WITH DESTINY**

**THEY WERE ANGELS IN WAITING
WAITING FOR WINGS
TO FLY FROM THIS WORLD
AWAY FROM THEIR PAIN
TREASURING TIME
TILL TIME CAME TO LEAVE
LEAVING BEHIND
SWEET MEMORIES**

**ANGELS IN WAITING
ANGELS IN WAITING FOR WINGS
THEY ALWAYS KNEW THEY'D NEVER
GROW OLD
SOMETIMES THE BODY IS WEAKER THAN
THE SOUL
IN THEIR DARKEST HOUR I MADE A
PROMISE
I WILL ALWAYS KEEP
I'LL GIVE THEM LIFE
I'LL LET THEM LIVE THROUGH ME**

**THEY WERE ANGELS IN WAITING
WAITING FOR WINGS
TO FLY FROM THIS WORLD
AWAY FROM THEIR PAIN
TREASURING TIME
TILL TIME CAME TO LEAVE
LEAVING BEHIND
SWEET MEMORIES**

**ANGELS IN WAITING
ANGELS IN WAITING
FOR ME**

WRITTEN BY TAMMY COCHRAN

Working the Night Shift

Recently while on vacation, we challenged each other to reading the other's type of story. You know the guy type of book, and the girl kind. Faith presented Scott with a Lori Wick book. Lori Wick is a Christian romance writer. From Scott's collection of favorite books, he selected a Zane Grey book called "The Shepherd of Guadeloupe".

Two things struck Faith about the book she read. First, she suddenly realized that the so called "westerns", are really romance novels in disguise, and secondly, she thought of how little sleep shepherds must get, because even in the night time they are caring for their sheep. We could relate to this, as I'm sure you can too. The agitation, lack of sleep, seizures, nightmares and other night time disturbances which Battens caused, makes it necessary for us to sleep with two monitors at our head.

We have just recently completed a study of the shepherd's life. We discovered something that made an old portion of scripture fresh again. In the days of the Bible, when a young man started his career as a shepherd, he was given a shepherd's staff. This staff would remain with him for the duration of his life, and would be buried with him. It became a diary, or a record of his life. Whenever something of significance would occur, the shepherd would cut a notch into that staff, allowing him to recall that event. It is always important to be able to remember valuable memories, especially when you're "working the night shift", the times when you are alone, the wolf is at your door and the lion is roaring in the night.

As a family of braille users, we know that the fingers can read in the darkness, when our eyes cannot see. We could easily envision the shepherd running his fingers over the staff, in the middle of the night, and recalling when previous wolves and lions had been defeated. What confidence would fill his heart. If God had been there before. He would be there again.

Perhaps David was on the night shift when he wrote Psalm 23:4 Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.

His staff had become a finger diary, of God's involvement in his life, and so, he calls it God's staff. Why don't you take time to run your fingers over the record of God's involvement in your life. It will give you this assurance, in the middle of the night shift "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me ALL the days of my life; and (when my life is over, and my staff is buried with me) I shall dwell in the hours of the Lord forever."

Working the Night Shift; Scott and Faith Cross

Remembering

***Go ahead and mention my child,
The one that died, you know.
Don't worry about hurting me further.
The depth of my pain doesn't show.
Don't worry about making me cry.
I'm already crying inside.
Help me to heal by releasing
The tears that I try to hide.
I'm hurt when you just keep silent,
Pretending he didn't exist.
I'd rather you mention my child.
Knowing that he has been missed.
You asked me how I was doing.
I say "pretty good" or "fine."
But healing is something ongoing.
I feel it will take a lifetime.***



Anniversaries and holidays - times that used to mean joy and celebration - can be among the toughest now. Observe them with care and simple ceremony to ease the pain.

The Grieving Family

As a grieving parent you are torn between the needs of your children and the all consuming presence of your own broken heart. You want to think only of the children, and sometimes you can focus on their needs. At other times your own hurts dominate your thoughts whether you want them or not. You are torn between being concerned and feeling guilty because you aren't concerned enough.

The early period of grief is a whirl of thoughts and feelings. We ask a question, and before anyone can answer, another question pops up. We seem to have two tracks running in our heads. One track says, "I am crushed and don't think I can ever get up." The other track is demanding that God or somebody explain why this happened. We are constantly jumping from one track to the other.

We also change tracks in our concern for our children. Part of the time we can focus on them with great intensity. Part of the time we focus on our own pain. Too often, instead of accepting this as normal, we beat on ourselves and feel guilty. If you are living in this world of ambivalence, you are not being selfish, you are trying to survive. There is a big difference between selfishness and survival.

I know you feel like your children are in their time of greatest need right now, and you seem to have so little to give to them. It is easy to "should" yourself into a nervous collapse over this inability to give. The truth is your ability to give is diminished right now, but that will change in time. Your strength will return, and you will have much to give in the future.

The good news is, your children will need you the most about the time you are able to give. Most of the time children grieve on a different schedule than adults. They seem to have a wonderful way of delaying reality, they begin dealing with a loss much later than an adult. In most children, there will be time to at least catch your breath and walk through some of the roughest parts of grief before the children really need massive time and effort.

When an airplane prepares to take off, the flight attendant announces that if the oxygen mask falls down and you are flying with a small child, you are to put the mask on yourself first and then the child. The same is true of grief. First take care of you. The children will be in denial for awhile and you can be free to give yourself the care you need for right now.

This means you need to relax, you aren't a horrible parent. Your ability to care as much as you want to has been crushed under a load of personal grief. Your time has also been captured by the demands of getting things in order and preparing for the years ahead.

I heard a mother in great anguish relate how terrible she felt

because she was having to finish her degree in order to provide for her children. She thought she should be able to do it all, and still be the perfect mom. She thought she was failing her children at the time of their deepest need. The day will come when you can care and give. Until that day comes, give what you can and do not worry about the rest.

There is no need to panic. Grief is transition. How you feel today is not how you are going to feel tomorrow. Your feelings will return, and they will return much quicker if you do not intensify them by a sense of urgency and panic. Panic leads to pressure yourself the more energy you waste. You need all of your energy to face each day. One woman said, "Every morning I tell myself, I will not "should" on me today." Good advice.

Doug Manning

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Letter written by Cory Bingham's grandfather who has also passed away.

Dear Cory,
I miss your little smile, the way you demanded attention. I wish you didn't have to leave, but I know it was for the best. You're happy now, and a whole little boy. I am sorry I wasn't there for you when you needed me the most. I am sorry I wasn't there when you passed over. I could have helped you through your last few minutes with us. Grandma and I loved you dearly, and miss you.

Love,
Grandpa

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Life Goes On An Interview with Edie Dockter

Edie Dockter is the mother of three children, each of them affected with Batten Disease. In September of 1987 Laurie passed away at the age of 24. Tommy died on his 30th birthday, September 1995.

Ken, her youngest, is 34 and still able to eat puréed food. Edie stops by the nursing home daily to feed him breakfast. All year long, 5 days a week, Ken takes a bus to a United Cerebral Palsy Program "He thrives on socialization and hearing other voices, Edie explained. "They include Ken in everything."

With this load of sorrow and loss, Edie could have gone into a deep depression. Instead she attended the first Basic Research Conference, October 1987, in Long Island.

"I learned a lot about research going on in this fatal disease," Edie recalled. "Doctors from all over the world were there."

Under Judy Grant's leadership, the first parents' support group came into being at the conference. Edie took charge of gathering a database of Batten families, a job she continues to this day. Now there are 700 families registered, with 1070 cases: Between Edie and Kathy, the data base for each family is kept up to date, noting blood work and symptoms." The forms we give for families to fill out are very helpful to researchers," The forms we give for families to fill out are very helpful to researchers," Edie said, "They come in from all over the world." The family registry phone number is 1-800-952-9626.

In August of 1993, Edie experienced the death of her mother from cancer. "During her illness, a hospice nurse came to the house. I was impressed with the care and concern she gave to my mother," Edie recalled. "I wanted to give something back."

So Edie trained to become a hospice volunteer. What does a family need most when one of its members approaches death? "Someone to listen, where its safe to spill their guts out," Edie answered. "The pressure builds up. They need to get away."

Edie encourages caregivers in a hospice situation to take time out just for themselves, to be rejuvenated. "I remember how hard it was for me to ask for help with my sick children," Edie said. "It was devastating to ask for help and find none available. Hospice fills that need."

What has kept this amazing woman from becoming bitter? "What good is complaining? Bitterness doesn't help me or anybody else," Edie replied. "I get my strength from God. If it were not for him, I couldn't have gotten through it."

Another channel for her energy was being a volunteer at the nursing home. Laurie and Tommy were both placed there at the same time. Edie logged 15,000 hours of helping. What's the key to feeling good now? This question brought a laugh and some good suggestions:

- * **Do something for yourself**
- * **Play golf**
- * **Go out with friends**
- * **Find a support system**

Edie is grateful for a group of 10 friends, dating back to P.T.A. "When a child was sick or there was a death in the family, they were a big help, like a support group," she said. "Also my mother-in-law was really good with her grandchildren. She was available to take care of them so that I could get out."

Editors' note: Thank you, Edie Doctor, for inspiring us to help others.

“A Perfect Place”

**It is not always for us to understand,
Just how things fit into God’s master plan,
But in His plan, there is to see,
A perfect place for Jonathan to be.**

**Without the pain, without the unknown,
Surrounded with peace, to call his own,
Without restrictions, without any limits,
Jonathan is resting now; free in spirit.**

**It is now that we had to let him go,
There is something that you have to know,
God doesn’t make mistakes,
We are his to give, and his to take.**

**He takes us when he knows it is our time,
When our battles we can no longer climb,
Those left behind may find it hard to conceive,
But God give comfort, your grief he can relieve.**

**God smiled upon Jonathan, then extended his hand,
Jonathan reached back because he did understand
Though his life was short, he did all he had to do,
Exactly what God asked him to do,**

**We can never forget, what Jonathan has left behind
There are so many memories to see us through.**

**In Gods plan, there you see,
A place so perfect for Jonathan to be,
His spirit is at peace, his soul has found rest,
he is being cared for by God now.
God loves him best in his perfect place**

**Written by: Terri Turner-Smith for
Jonathan Bauer - 6/17/98-6/23/03**

THE BLESSING OF THORNS

Sandra felt as low as the heels of her shoes as she pushed against a November gust and the florist shop door.

Her life had been easy, like a spring breeze. Then in the fourth month of her second pregnancy, a minor automobile accident stole that from her.

During this Thanksgiving week she would have delivered a son. She grieved over her loss. As if that weren’t enough, her husband’s company threatened a transfer.

Then her sister, whose holiday visit she coveted, called saying she could not come for the holiday.

Then Sandra’s friend infuriated her by suggesting her grief was a God-given path to maturity that would allow her to empathize with other who suffer. She has no idea what I’m feeling, thought Sandra with a shudder. Thanksgiving?

Thankful for what? She wondered. For a careless driver whose truck was hardly scratched when he rear-ended her? For an airbag that saved her life but took that of her child?

“Good afternoon, can I help you?” The shop clerk’s approach startled her.

“I...I need an arrangement,” stammered Sandra.

“For Thanksgiving? Do you want beautiful but ordinary, or would you like to challenge the day with a customer favorite I call the Thanksgiving “Special?” asked the shop clerk. “I’m convinced that flowers tell stories,” she continued. “Are you looking for something that conveys ‘gratitude’ this Thanksgiving?”

“Not exactly!” Sandra blurted out. “In the last five months, everything that could go wrong has gone wrong.”

Sandra regretted her outburst, and was surprised when the shop clerk said, “I have the perfect arrangement for you.”

Just then the shop door’s small bell rang, and the shop clerk said, “Hi, Barbara...let me get your order.” She politely excused herself and walked toward a small workroom, then quickly reappeared, carrying an arrangement of greenery, bow, and long-stemmed thorny roses. Except the ends of the rose stems were neatly snipped: there were no flowers.

“Want this in a box?” asked the clerk.

Sandra watched for the customer’s response. Was this a joke?

Who would want rose stems with no flowers! She waited for laughter, but neither woman laughed.

“Yes, please,” Barbara, replied with an appreciative smile.

“You’d think after three years of getting the special, I wouldn’t be so moved by its significance, but I can feel it right here, all over again, “she said as she gently tapped her chest. And she left with her order.

“Uh,” stammered Sandra, “that lady just left with, uh... she just left with no flowers!

“Right, said the clerk, “I cut off the flowers. That’s the Special I call it the Thanksgiving Thorns Bouquet.”

“Oh, come on, you can’t tell me someone is willing to pay

for that! “ exclaimed Sandra.

“Barbara came into the shop three years ago feeling much like you feel today,” explained the clerk. “She thought she had very little to be thankful for. She had lost her father to cancer, the family business was failing, her son was into drugs, and she was facing major surgery.”

“That same year I had lost my husband,” continued the clerk, “and for the first time in my life, had just spent the holidays alone.”

“I had no children, no husband, no family nearby, and too great a debt to allow any travel.”

“So what did you do? asked Sandra.

“I learned to be thankful for the thorns,” answered the clerk quietly.

“I’ve always thanked God for the good things in my life and never questioned the good things that happened to me, but when the bad stuff hit, did I ever ask questions! It took time for me to learn that dark times are important. I have always enjoyed the ‘flowers’ of life, but it took the thorns to show me the beauty of God’s comfort. You know, the Bible says that God comforts us when we’re afflicted, and from His consolation we learn to comfort others.”

Sandra sucked in her breath as she thought about the very thing her friend had tried to tell her. “I guess the truth is I don’t want comfort. I’ve lost a baby and I’m angry with God.”

Just then someone else walked in the shop. “Hey, Phil!” shouted the clerk to the balding rotund man.

“My wife sent me in to get our usual Thanksgiving Special...12 thorny, long stemmed stems!” laughed Phil as the clerk handed him a tissue-wrapped arrangement from the refrigerator. “Those are for your wife?” asked Sandra incredulously “Do you mind me asking why she wants something that looks like that?”

“No. I’m glad you asked,” Phil replied. “Four years ago my wife and I nearly divorced. After forty years, we were in a real mess, but with the Lord’s grace and guidance, we slogged through problem after problem. He rescued our marriage. Jenny here (the clerk) told me she kept a vase of rose stems to remind her of what she learned from “thorny” times, and that was good enough for me. I took home some of those stems. My wife and I decided to label each one for a specific “problem” and give thanks for what that problem taught us.”

As Phil paid the clerk, he said to Sandra, “I highly recommend the Special!”

“I don’t know if I can be thankful for the thorns in my life.”

Sandra said. “It’s all too...fresh.”

“Well,” the clerk replied carefully, “my experience has shown me that the thorns make roses more precious. We treasure God’s providential care more during trouble than at any other time. Remember, it was a crown of thorns that Jesus wore so we might know His love Don’t resent the thorns.”

Tears rolled down Sandra’s cheeks. For the first time since the accident, she loosened her grip on resentment. “I’ll take those twelve long-stemmed thorns, please,” she managed to choke out. “I hoped you would,” said the clerk gently. “I’ll have them ready in a minute.”

“Thank you. What do I owe you?” “Nothing. Nothing but a promise to allow God to heal your heart. The first year’s arrangement is always on me.” The clerk smiled and handed a card to Sandra. “I’ll attach this card to your arrangement, but maybe you would like to read it first.”

It read: “My God, I have never thanked You for my thorns. I have thanked You a thousand times for my roses, but never once for my thorns. Teach me the glory of the cross I bear; teach me the value of my thorns. Show me that I have climbed closer to You along the path of pain. Show me that, through my tears, the colors of Your rainbow look much more brilliant.”

Praise Him for your roses; thank him for your thorns!

Author Unknown

Learn from those who have experienced healing after loss. Their survival is reassuring proof that you, too, will endure.

A Story With A Moral



Once there was a little boy who died and went to heaven, a place where lots of children could be seen all dressed in white. They were all happy and met a lot of new friends in a beautiful place where love reigned. Every day God would come to get the children to take a walk with Him and they all went with Him holding a lighted candle in their hands. One

day God noticed that amongst all of the children, there was one little boy who never went to walk with them and He asked why he did not go. The little boy said:

“Every time I want to go with you, I light my candle but as soon as I get ready to go with you, my mother’s tears extinguish the candle fire and I have to say alone. My mom is in a lot of pain and I cannot be happy seeing her like this. I am sad to think that my mom and dad do not remember me for the good moments we shared before I departed from their lives. I wish that they would know that I love them forever and I want them to be happy so I can be happy.”

The moral of the story: There is a time for grieving and a time to let go so that the departed child can continue his journey as well as the parents being able to laugh again, knowing that their child is happy in the paradise where he now lives.

The Seasons of Grief

All winter we looked forward to Summer. It arrived and now is rapidly moving towards Fall. It becomes difficult sometimes to remember what day it is as the tasks pile up and our duties and family responsibilities carry us forward.

Grief has seasons too. The seasons of grieving don’t move as orderly as Summer, Fall, Winter, Spring, but they too have their characteristics.

In the Spring of our grief, it is all new and grows faster than we can comprehend. Everything and everywhere reminds us of our pain which seems to fill every corner of our being. The rains of grief’s Spring are the tears.

In the Summer of our grief, we are surrounded by the fruits of our pain. We have days that are comfortable and seem manageable and days when our discomfort seems to take away the very air we need to breathe. But there are also good and comfortable days.

In the Fall of our grief, we begin to shed some of the defenses we have placed around us. Just as the trees shed their leaves we begin to shed isolation and loneliness as we join little by little in social, community and family event and manage to look forward to them sometimes.

And in the Winter of our grief, we rest, just as the earth rests from its season of growth and harvest. We take comfort in our memories and in our love and look forward to the next spring when we will grow ones again, this time as a new person, having realized what it means to go on.

And in each season come the unexpected storms that take us by surprise and cause us to run inward to escape the turmoil. But after the storm, the sun shines once again.

Dispelling 5 COMMON MYTHS About Grief

by Alan D. Wolfelt
Director, Center For Loss and Life Transition
Fort Collins, Colorado

Many people have a real desire to learn more about the experience of death and grief. Without a doubt we have witnessed an upsurge in interest in bereavement caregiving. However, many well-intentioned, yet misinformed people are still victims of some widely held myths regarding grief.

The purpose of this article is to identify, describe and dispel five common myths about grief. Providing quality care to the bereaved requires that we as a society work to dispel these myths outlined below. People who have internalized these myths become incapable of helping griever’s move toward healing.

These myths are not intended to be all-inclusive or mutually exclusive. Observation suggests that many people who believe any one of these will also believe in many, if not all, of the others. Our joint task is not to condemn these people, but supportively encourage them to broaden their understanding of the complex experiences of grief and mourning.

Describing and Dispelling the Myths

Myth #1: *Grief and mourning are the same experience.*

The majority of people tend to use the words grief and mourning synonymously. However, there is an important distinction between them. We have learned that people move toward healing not by just grieving, but through mourning.

If we want to help the bereaved we can work to understand the semantic distinctions of these commonly used terms. Simply stated, grief is the thoughts and feelings that are experienced within oneself upon the death of someone loved. In other words, grief is the internal meaning given to the experience of bereavement.

Mourning is taking the internal experience of grief and expressing it outside of oneself.

(Cont. on page 8)

The specific ways in which people express mourning are influenced by customs of their culture. Another way of defining mourning is to state that it is “grief gone public” or “sharing one’s grief outside of oneself.”

In reality, many people in our culture grieve, but they do not mourn. As opposed to being encouraged to express their grief outwardly they are often greeted with messages along the lines of “carry on,” “keep your chin up,” and “keep busy.” So they end up grieving within themselves in isolation, instead of mourning outside of themselves in the presence of loving companions.

Now that these terms have been defined in a more formal sense, let's take a moment to acknowledge that grief and mourning are much more personal experiences than their words describe. Actually, this author finds words inadequate to convey what grief and mourning are all about.

Grief and mourning are much more than words. Experiencing the thoughts and feelings of grief is often movement through an unknown territory that is embraced by an overwhelming sense of pain and loss. Only through encouraging ourselves and others to mourn outside of ourselves will we become a catalyst for healing.

Don't just grieve, mourn, too, and be proud of your capacity to do so!

Myth #2: There is a predictable and orderly stage-like progression to the experience of mourning.

Stage-like thinking about both dying and mourning has been appealing to many people. Somehow the "stages of grief" have helped people try to make sense out of an experience that isn't as orderly and predictable as we would like it to be. Attempts have been made to replace fear and lack of understanding with the security that everyone grieves by going through the same stages. If only it were so simple!

The concept of "stages" was popularized in 1969 with the publication of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' landmark text *On Death and Dying*. Kubler-Ross never intended for the people to literally interpret her five "stages of dying." However, many people have done just that and the consequences have often been disastrous.

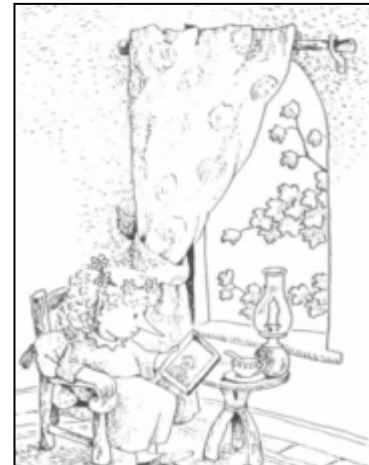
One such consequence is when people around the grieving person adopt a rigid system of beliefs about grief that do not allow for the natural unfolding of the mourner's personal experience. We have come to understand that each person's grief is uniquely his or her own. As helpers we only get ourselves in trouble when we try to prescribe what someone's grief experience *should be*.

Just as different people die in different ways, people mourn in different ways. Expecting anything less would be to demonstrate a lack of respect for the uniqueness of the person. This author prefers a helping attitude that conveys the following: "Teach me about your grief and I will be with you. As you teach me I will follow the lead you provide me and attempt to be a stabilizing and empathetic presence."

To think that one's goal as a caregiver is to move people through the stages of grief would be a misuse of counsel. A variety of unique thoughts and feelings will be experienced as part of the healing process. For example, disorganization, fear, guilt, and anger may or may not occur. Often, regression occurs along the way and invariably some overlapping. Sometimes emotions follow each other within a short period

of time; at other times, two or more emotions are present in the grieving person simultaneously.

Do not prescribe how someone should grieve, but allow them to *teach you* where they are in the process.



Be open to the pain of your broken heart. God enters though its brokenness.

Myth #3: It is best to move away from grief instead of towards it.

The unfortunate reality is that many griever's do not give themselves permission or receive permission from others to mourn, to express their many thoughts and feelings. We continue to live in a society that often encourages people to prematurely move away from their grief instead of toward it. The result is that many people either grieve in isolation or attempt to run away from their grief through various means.

During ancient times, stoic philosophers encouraged their followers not to mourn, believing that self-control was the appropriate response to sorrow. Still today, well intentioned but uninformed people carry on this long-held tradition. A vital task of the helper is to encourage and support the movement toward an outward expression of grief.

One of the reasons for many people's preoccupation with the very question "how long does grief last?" often relates to society's impatience with grief and the desire to move people away from the experience of mourning. Shortly after the funeral (if a funeral is held) the grieving person is expected to "be back to normal."

Persons who continue to express their grief outwardly are often viewed as "weak," "crazy", or "self-pitying." The common message is "shape up and get on with your life." The reality is that many people view grief as *something to be overcome rather than experienced*.

The result of these kinds of messages is to encourage the repression of the griever's thoughts and feelings. Refusing to

allow tears, suffering in silence, and “being strong,” are thought to be admirable behaviors. Many people in grief have internalized society’s message that mourning should be done quietly, quickly, and efficiently.

Returning to the routine of work shortly after the death of someone loved, the bereaved person relates, “I’m fine,” in essence saying “I’m not mourning.” Friends, family, and co-workers often encourage this stance and refrain from talking about the death. The bereaved person having an apparent absence of mourning (having moved away from their grief instead of toward it) tends to be more socially accepted by those around him or her.

However, this type of collaborative pretense surrounding grief does not meet the emotional needs of the bereaved person. Instead, the survivor is likely to feel further isolated in the experience of grief, with the eventual onset of the “going crazy syndrome.” Attempting to mask or move away from the grief results in internal anxiety and confusion. With little, if any, social recognition related to the pain of the grief, the person often begins to think their thoughts and feelings are abnormal. As a matter of fact, the most frequent initial comment of grieving persons at our Center for Loss and Life Transition in Colorado is the statement, “I think I’m going crazy.”

Our society encourages people to prematurely move away from their grief instead of toward it. If we want to help bereaved people we must remember that it is through the process of moving toward pain that we move toward eventual healing.

Myth #4: *Following the death of someone significant to you, the goal is to “get over” your grief.*

We have all had the unfortunate experience of hearing people inquire of the bereaved person, “Are you over it yet?” Or, even worse yet, we hear people comment, “Well, they should be over it by now.” To think that we as human beings “get over” our grief is ludicrous!

The final dimension of grief in a number of proposed models is often referred to as resolution, recover, reestablishment, or reorganization. This dimension often suggests a total return to “normalcy” and yet in my personal, as well as professional experience, everyone is changed by the experience of grief.

For the mourner to assume that life will be exactly as it was prior to the death is unrealistic and potentially damaging. Recovery as understood by some persons, mourners and caregivers alike, is all too often seen erroneously as an absolute, a perfect state of reestablishment.

Reconciliation is a term this author believes to be more expressive of what occurs as the person works to integrate the new reality of moving forward in life without the physical

presence of the person who has died. What occurs is a renewed sense of energy and confidence, an ability to fully acknowledge the reality of the death, and the capacity to become reinvolved with the activities of living. Also, an acknowledgment occurs that pain and grief are difficult yet necessary parts of life and living.

As the experience of reconciliation unfolds, the mourner recognizes that life without the presence of the significant person who has died. A realization occurs that reconciliation is a process, not an event. Beyond an intellectual working through is an emotional working through. What has been understood at the “head” level is now understood at the “heart” level—the person who was loved is dead.

The pain changes from being ever-present, sharp, and stinging to an acknowledged felling of loss that has given rise to renewed meaning and purpose. The sense of loss does not completely disappear yet softens and the intense pangs of grief become less frequent.

Hope for a continued life emerges as the griever is able to make commitments to the future, realizing that the dead person will never be forgotten, yet knowing that one’s own life can and will move forward.

We never “get over” our grief but instead become reconciled to it. Those people who think the goal is to “resolve” grief become destructive to the healing process.

Myth #5: *Tears expressing grief are only a sign of weakness.*

Unfortunately, many people associate tears of grief with personal inadequacy and weakness. Crying on the part of the mourner often generates feelings of helplessness in friends, family, and caregivers.

Out of a wish to protect the mourner from pain, those people surrounding the mourner may serve to inhibit the experience of tears. Comments similar to, “tears won’t bring him back” and “he wouldn’t want you to cry” discourage the expression of tears. Yet crying is nature’s way of releasing internal tension in the body allow the mourner to communicate a need to be comforted.

Another function of crying is postulated in the context of attachment wherein tears are intended to bring about reunion with the lost person. While the reunion cannot occur, crying is thought to be biologically based and a normal way of attempting to reconnect with the person who has died. The frequency and intensity of crying eventually wanes as the hoped-for reunion does not occur.

While research in this area is still limited, some investigators have suggested that suppressing tears may increase susceptibility to stress-related disorders. This would seem to

make sense in that crying is an exocrine response, one of the excretory processes. In reviewing other excretory processes, such as sweating and exhaling, the fact is that they all involve the removal of waste product from the body. Crying may serve a similar function.

In this author's clinical experience with thousands of people in grief, changes in physical expression have been observed following the expression have been observed following the expression of tears. While this is purely a subjective observation, seemingly not only do people feel better after crying, they also look better. Expressions of tension and agitation seem to flow of their body. The capacity to express tears appears to allow for a genuine healing.

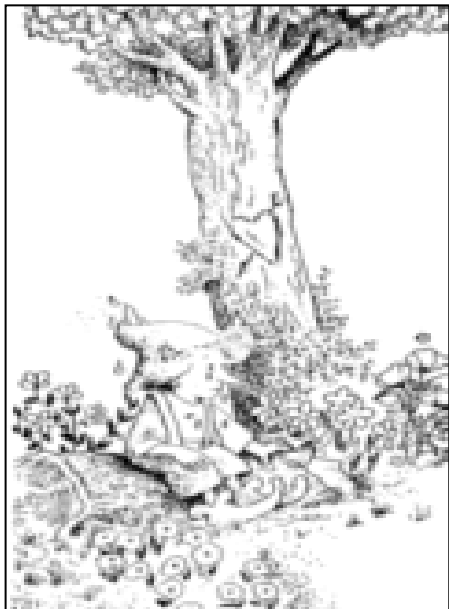
The expression of tears are not a sign of weakness. The capacity of the mourner to share tears is an indication of the willingness to do the "work of mourning."

Final Thoughts

Again, be aware that the above myths are not intended to be all-inclusive. This author suggests the reader develop a list of any additional "grief myths" observed in our society.

Being surrounded by people who believe in these myths invariably results in a heightened sense of isolation and aloneness in the grieving person. The inability to be supported in the "work of mourning" destroys much of the capacity to enjoy life, living, and loving.

Only when we as a society are able to dispel these myths will grieving people experience the healing they deserve!



Cry. Your tears testify to your love. And tears that spring from love help bring healing and renewal.

In closing: Your contributions made this edition of The Lighthouse comforting and real. Thank you. Let's do it again for the winter newsletter.

Peace & joy,

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