

Volume 10, Issue 4

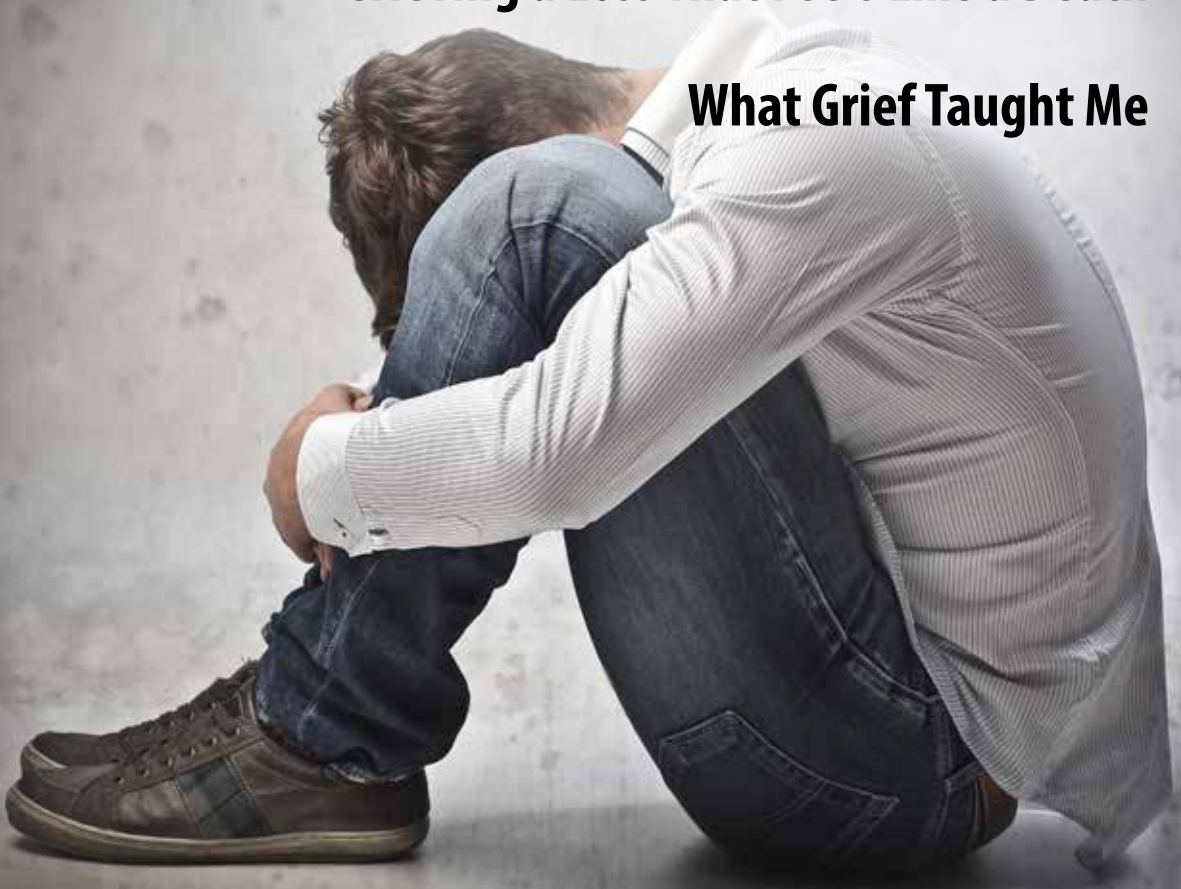
MOTIVATED

THE MAGAZINE THAT MOVES YOU!

HOW TO HEAL AND RECOVER FROM LOSS

Grieving a Loss That Feels Like a Death

What Grief Taught Me



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Issue Editor

Motivated Vol 10, Issue 4
Christina Lane

Design

awex

**Contact Us:
Email
Website**

motivated@motivatedmagazine.com
www.motivatedmagazine.com

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Life is filled with loss, and the grieving of those losses. There are times when we grieve the loss of possessions and relationships, the loss of people, or our own physical or mental abilities that were once so natural. We grieve the loss of dreams and a former way of life. These losses and the grieving of them, are to be expected as we navigate through our lives.

But there is also unexpected grief, and this is perhaps the hardest to accept. Sudden, gut-wrenching, life-altering grief—like a fatal accident, or a fatal heart attack. Or slow, ongoing grief that ends in death—like terminal cancer.

Nobody goes through life without experiencing grief. We will all experience grief in some way. We can't change this, but we all must find a way to live with it.

A few months ago, I suddenly lost a very dear friend after a short battle with cancer. I had only recently communicated with her, and she was so hopeful that the treatment she had chosen would work and help her recover. I was waiting for a reply to my email inquiring how the first treatment had gone, but it never came. Instead I heard that her son and daughter had traveled to be with her during the last few days of her life, and that she had died shortly after their arrival.

Her loss made me pause, and reminded me of other losses I've experienced in my life: the loss of both my parents, and the loss of two of my grandchildren due to complications at birth. Sometimes the memories of these losses are overwhelmingly painful.

During times like that, I often find strength in reading about those who have worked through their grief and pain, and have come out on the other side with hope, healing, and inspiration.

I hope reading some of these stories and articles in this issue of *Motivated* can make a difference to those of you going through a period of grief, and will help you find comfort—as it did for me. You are not alone.

Christina Lane
For *Motivated*

Kafka and the Doll

Web Reprint



Franz Kafka, the story goes, encountered a little girl in the park where he went walking daily. She was crying. She had lost her doll and was desolate.

Kafka offered to help her look for the doll and arranged to meet her the next day at the same spot.

Unable to find the doll he composed a letter from the doll and read it to her when they met: “Please do not mourn me, I have gone on a trip to see the world. I will write you of my adventures.”

This was the beginning of many letters. When he and the little girl met he read

her from these carefully composed letters the imagined adventures of the beloved doll. The little girl was comforted.

When the meetings came to an end Kafka presented her with a doll. She obviously looked different from the original doll. An attached letter explained, “My travels have changed me.”

Many years later, the now grown girl found a letter stuffed into an unnoticed crevice in the cherished replacement doll.

In summary it said, “Everything that you love, you will eventually lose, but in the end, love will return in a different form.” ■

How to Heal and Recover from Loss

By Ronald Alexander, PhD. adapted

I don't believe we ever get over a significant loss, but we do learn to move through it, live with it, and perhaps even use it creatively to find our life's purpose, and harvest its lessons.

Many of us deal with devastating losses in our lives. After the initial shock of any type of trauma, there are, of course, the various stages of grief that everyone goes through, including denial, rationalization, anger, and acceptance. For those who are on this journey, it is important to have faith in yourself and the inner compass that guides you. If you do this, you'll understand that opportunities for growth and happiness lie in the most unexpected places, ready to be seized if you're open to recognizing and embracing them.

Mark and Selena are a remarkable example of how you can deal with a devastating loss and transform your life. Their two young children had been killed in a car crash when they were with their teenage babysitter, who

somehow survived. Mark and Selena were overwhelmed with guilt, anger, and feelings of loss. They could barely function, and couldn't begin to imagine how they could go on without their children, or why they would want to.

After talking with them, I was concerned that due to the depth of their sadness, it could take several years before they would be ready to move out of their grief and begin to envision a new life. I decided to meditate on their situation, and what came to me was the visual image of the subcontinent of India. "That's curious," I thought, but I had an inner knowing that I needed to suggest to Mark and Selena, who had conveyed an openness to the idea of traveling, to take some time off from their jobs and travel to India.

My logical, rational mind said, “Ron, that’s crazy. Why would you send two grieving and suffering parents to India?”

When I mentioned it to Mark and Selena, they weren’t sure how they would benefit from it, but they thought about it and told me that taking the trip felt “right” to them.

In India, Mark and Selena connected with their grief, but at the same time, they started to feel a sense of connection to other people. While there, they spent time working with a committed humanitarian in her facility for the poor. She did not try to explain to Mark and Selena how they might handle their loss, but instead invited them to join her in her everyday work of attending to the sick and dying.

When they returned to the States, Mark and Selena told me that they had finally begun to heal. The deep compassion that had been awakened in them had eased their grief, and they felt that they’d transformed from suffering parents who had lost their children to people who reached out to other suffering parents. They said they no longer felt quite so alone.

Over the next few months, Mark and Selena began to move forward with their lives. They continued to talk about their children who died, and kept photographs of them in their home, but they were able to creatively transform their tragedy into a new life with meaning and purpose.

Mark and Selena’s journey was *theirs*, and the healing process *they* went through. Below are some ways that might support and help you find healing for yourself:

1. Reach out for support. Reach out to others when you are grieving.

Ask for assistance from your friends, spiritual leaders, support groups, and professionals.

2. Discover your inner and outer resources.

In times of grief, when you feel weak and overwhelmed, sit still and reflect on what resources you have. It can be the people in your life who support you, and it can also be music, prayer, sport, art, writing, a pet, or any other resource that is nurturing for you.

3. Learn to keep yourself centered through the unbearable feelings of grief. When the waves of sadness and helplessness wash over you, initially feel the emotion and its depth, and allow yourself to stay with the grief. Feel where it is in your body and then start to breathe through the grief with slow, deep breaths. This will help you stay grounded and bring you back to the present.

4. Start imagining a new life. This is something that can be done after some time. Start to imagine and invent in your mind’s eye a new future for yourself.

5. Practice mindfulness. While doing grounding practices such as meditation, prayer, yoga or even walks in nature, remember that your loss is cyclical like the seasons. Even when we are in the depths of winter, we know that eventually it will become more manageable with the advent of summer. Learn to tolerate and pace yourself through the most severe times.

It is difficult to go through loss and grief, and at times, it can feel like there is no end to it. However, hold on, and allow yourself the time and space to grieve. It is then that you can slowly reengage with life, and once again learn to see the beauty and joy that life has to offer. ■



Using Grief to Help Others—and Heal Yourself

By Jan DeBlieu, adapted

I've often wondered why comforting others makes me feel so much more alive. Recently I've realized that having walked through the fire, I may be specially equipped to help others make the passage, and survive.

I have an odd kind of superpower. I can look at people who are suffering and feel immediate empathy for them. I'm not bragging here; it's true.

It's because I've been through my own brand of hell.

Six years ago we lost our 16-year-old son, our only child, in a car accident.

When I tell someone this—and I avoid telling people, believe me—the most frequent response is, “I can't imagine.”

This is shorthand for, “I can't imagine the depth of your pain. I can't imagine the bleakness of your life. How empty your house must seem. How endless each and every day.”

They're right; they can't. Fortunately, time is indeed the great healer. My pain, bleakness, and emptiness have mostly receded. They may come swimming right back to the surface, though, if I see someone else in pain.

The question then becomes how I respond. Do I allow these feelings to overwhelm me, and retreat into the dark sorrow I know so well? Sometimes, yes, I do. But more often—I've been working hard on this—I try to stand silently for a moment, letting myself feel the other person's pain. I ask myself if there's something I can do to help.

Often the best thing I can do for the person is simply to listen to his story. To ask questions like I'm really interested, which I am. To stay with them until my heart tells me it's okay to leave.

All this can be a powerful balm for someone who's having a terrible moment, or a terrible day. I know from experience. And when I comfort others, simply by being present for them, it's also a powerful balm for me.

I'm like everyone else, though, when it comes to having too much to do. Often I'll see a person in need and speed right by. The world is full of pain. I can't take it all on. No one is asking that I try.

It's my belief that I'm simply being asked to pay attention to suffering, and to step in when I sense an opportunity.

I might well have taken a different approach. People tell me I'm a strong woman, and after Reid's death my first impulse was to declare war on my grief. For a time I tried pushing through, powering on with my life despite all. But there was one sentiment I couldn't wrestle to the ground: My life had lost

its meaning.

Gradually I realized that I might be able to find meaning and purpose again if I set out to help people make it through their own empty moments. To my amazement, I found that simple acts of kindness and compassion helped me rekindle the light that lives deep inside me.

I've often wondered why comforting others makes me feel so much more alive. Recently I've realized that having walked through the fire, I may be specially equipped to help others make the passage, and survive.

Grief has taught me that I can reach out, if only I dare. This is the source of my "superpower": The willingness to look at suffering full on, without flinching. We'd rather not be confronted by deep pain in this culture. We'd rather keep it hidden, and hide it within ourselves. But by hiding it, we imprison ourselves in the loneliest kind of solitary confinement. Breaking out, taking a chance and extending a hand to others, has been for me both a lifesaver and a way to honor Reid.

It would be an exaggeration to say that I keep my eyes peeled for people in pain or trouble. I simply try to stay aware of my surroundings, and to be open to engagement with those around me. This is the complete opposite of how I moved through my world right after Reid's death, hooding my eyes, struggling just to carry the stone that had become my heart. It feels liberating now to be open to possibility, to lightness, and to wielding the immensely healing—for me—power that lies within three simple words: Can I help? ■

Grieving a Loss That Feels Like a Death

By Brisa Pinho,
adapted

Most grief books are written to help you mourn the death of a loved one and learn how to deal with their absence in this world.

Death is probably the most challenging thing a human can face. It breaks us down. It brings us to our knees. Some people are so significant in our lives that the mere thought of living without them feels incredibly overwhelming and incapacitating.

Losing someone we love is hard. Accepting loss is extremely challenging. So how do we cope with yearning and adapt to the emptiness following a divorce or huge breakup without feeling like a loser or the psycho who can't let go?

It's an unfair misconception to think that those who have a hard time letting go, or are taking longer than usual time to move on, are somewhat weak.

Psychology agrees that when a major relationship or marriage ends, the person

who was left may feel grief as painfully as someone who lost a loved one to death. Sometimes the pain can even be stronger.

Divorces and breakups can sometimes be worse than death, because the person who died to us is very much alive, haunting our every thought.

I remember how lost I felt right after my partner broke things off with me and left me. I remember packing my car with all my belongings and driving back to my home town with our eight-month-old son in the car crying the entire six hour drive.

I felt as if he had died. My whole world collapsed. I was terrified that I wouldn't be able to support our son.

I wondered how he would turn out without his father in his life. Would he feel unloved? Would he wonder why his father cut him out of his life? Would he blame himself or think he wasn't good enough for his dad?

So many questions rushed through my mind while I drove the vast freeway back

home.

I felt humiliated. I felt alone. I felt a variety of feelings and emotions. But the one emotion that I always remember is the feeling of loss. I had lost everything I ever thought I would eventually have. The family, the life, and most importantly, the man. The man I had loved for five years had died.

His body was still there but his soul was gone. Everything I ever thought of him was gone. His words were gone. His spiritual presence was gone.

There is a lot more to life than a physical body. Millions of people have experienced the death of their loved ones without ever having to plan their funeral.

When I arrived home it was time to pick up the pieces and move on. At least that's what everyone around me was telling me.

They expected me to shake everything off and move on with my life as if my son's father didn't exist. As if our story didn't happen. But accepting the death of someone in our lives is a process.

I kept going back and forth between missing him and hating him for leaving. At times the mixed emotions felt like I was literally sinking into insanity. One moment I would cry and the next I would yell.

Nobody told me that grief does that to people, and because I didn't know what I was feeling was normal, I felt even more alone.

I had never heard of the five stages of grief until I went to see a therapist, because the pain was so unbearable. It's then I learned that a person goes through denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance after the death (or loss) of a loved one.

Unlike what I originally believed, there is no specific order to these feelings. You may feel as if you are on an emotional rollercoaster as you are jumping from stage to stage. It's important to know that this emotional ride is normal, and if you get the proper help you will get off of it alive and stronger.

I know what it feels like to not want to get out of bed. I know what it feels like to not want to take a shower, or brush my teeth or even eat.

I know what is like to lose twenty pounds in six weeks, to lose friends, and to lose your dignity begging someone to take you back. I know the feeling that the world has ended and you were left behind alone and miserable.

I have been there, so believe me when I say that there is hope.

There is, in fact, a light at the end of the depression tunnel. But the only way to get to that light is to walk through it. There is no way of getting around the process, and the earlier you begin the journey of mourning and healing, the sooner you will reach peace.

The journey is long, but there is no race and no competition. It's a journey with yourself. There will be days when you will feel stronger than ever and some days will bring you back to your knees.

Just remember: the rollercoaster is the journey. So even when you are down, feeling as if you've made no progress, remember that progress is being made every day you choose to be alive.

Progress is being made every day you choose to not call the one who left you. Progress is being made every day you choose to take another breath. You are alive. You are strong. You will survive. ■

What Grief Taught Me

By Monique Minahan, adapted

Six years inside complicated grief taught me many things. Five of them I can put into words and onto paper. I have a feeling I will be learning from her the rest of my life.

Grief taught me that sometimes I don't have to let it go. I just have to let it out. Through writing, through words, through movement, through tears, through screaming at the top of my lungs or whispering to the wind. The way into grief was very narrow, but the way through was up to me.

Grief taught me that releasing is not the same as relinquishing. My grief is mine forever. When I release her into the world through words or conversation or tears, she is free to leave for a while or return right away, the same or changed, but always welcome in this heart.

Grief taught me what it means to be vulnerable. Not in the ways we choose to be vulnerable. The ways life tears down every wall we've built, every label we've claimed, every role we've identified with, and reveals a broken, beating heart that is not sure if it wants to live or die. With practice I realized that beyond the flood of tears there is the dock of another human heart waiting to hear what I have to say. And if I can brave the flood that makes me feel so exposed and vulnerable I will receive the gift of being seen and being heard.

Grief taught me I am not alone. I didn't realize it then, but looking back I understand that even when no human could comfort me, Mother Nature was soothing me with her bright moons, wild oceans, and dancing flowers. She was teaching me something about human nature, about darkness and light, about the cycle of life. She was taking my words and echoing them back to me, blurring their edges on the journey so they sat a little softer in my soul upon returning.

Grief taught me loss expands before it shrinks. The list of what I've lost is not just one line but pages long sometimes. Because I didn't just lose a human being I loved. I lost the sound of their feet in the hallway, the water running as they brush their teeth, the sight of their face down the hall, the sound of their voice on the phone, the ability to reach out and touch them. Everyone's list is unique and endless. I try to honor the living by not turning away from their list of loss, by not telling them what it should contain, by not comparing my list to theirs.

This grief, she's like a mother to me. She birthed me into an experience I never asked for and many times was not sure I would survive. But together we make it through this life, stumbling and learning, mourning and celebrating, each step teaching us all we need to know about what it means to live, to love and to lose. ■



THEY SOFTLY WALK

By Hugh Robert Orr

They are not gone who pass
Beyond the clasp of hand,
Out from the strong embrace.
They are but come so close
We need not grope with hands,
Nor look to see, nor try
To catch the sound of feet.
They have put off their shoes
Softly to walk by day
Within our thoughts, to tread
At night our dream-led paths
Of sleep.

They are not lost who find
The sunset gate, the goal
Of all their faithful years.
Not lost are they who reach
The summit of their climb,
The peak above the clouds
And storms. They are not lost
Who find the light of sun
And stars and God.

They are not dead who live
In hearts they leave behind.
In those whom they have blessed
They live a life again,
And shall live through the years
Eternal life, and grow
Each day more beautiful
As time declares their good,
Forgets the rest, and proves
Their immortality.

Comfort in Loss

NOTABLE
QUOTES



There are things that we don't want to happen but have to accept, things we don't want to know but have to learn, and people we can't live without but have to let go.—**Author Unknown**

Grieving is a necessary passage and a difficult transition to finally letting go of sorrow—it is not a permanent rest stop.
—**Dodinsky**

When you are sorrowful, look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight.—**Kahlil Gibran**

We must embrace pain and burn it as fuel for our journey.—**Kenji Miyazawa**

Time is a physician that heals every grief.—**Diphilus**

In the night of death, hope sees a star, and listening love can hear the rustle of a wing.—**Robert Ingersoll**

All that we can know about those we have loved and lost is that they would wish us to remember them with a more intensified realization of their reality. What is essential does not die but clarifies. The highest tribute to the dead is not grief but gratitude.—**Thornton Wilder**

Even hundredfold grief is divisible by love.—**Terri Guillemets**

Oh heart, if one should say to you that the soul perishes like the body, answer that the flower withers, but the seed remains.—**Khalil Gibran**

While we are mourning the loss of our friend, others are rejoicing to meet him behind the veil.—**John Taylor**

When someone you love becomes a memory, the memory becomes a treasure.—**Author unknown**