

**GRIEF:
EBB
TIDE**



By Cheryl McQueen

**FOLLOW UP SERIES
BOOK THREE**

GRIEF: EBB TIDE

By Cheryl McQueen
Follow Up Series
Book Three

IN MEMORY OF

LOU

1928 - 1992

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Cheryl McQueen



Risk

To laugh is to risk appearing the fool.
To weep is to risk appearing sentimental.
To reach out to others is to risk involvement.

To expose feelings is to risk exposing your true self.
To place your ideas and dreams before a crowd
is to risk their loss.

To love is to risk not being loved in return.
To live is to risk dying.
To hope is to risk despair.
To try is to risk failure.

But risks must be taken,
Because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing.

For the person who risks nothing, does nothing,
Has nothing and is nothing.

They may avoid suffering and sorrow.

But they cannot learn; they cannot feel; they cannot grow;
they cannot love; they cannot live.
Chained by their attitudes, they are a slave.
They have forfeited their freedom,
for only a person who risks is free.

For
If you cannot risk, you cannot grow;
If you cannot grow, you cannot become your best self;
If you cannot become your best self,
you cannot be happy.
And if you cannot be happy...what else matters?
What else matters, if you cannot be happy?

Anonymous

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Grief Ebb Tide

You have survived six months, six long months without your loved one by your side. Sometimes you feel that the pain is not so acute. You seem to go for days, even weeks leading a fairly "normal" life. Then all of a sudden, you are knocked off your feet. The pain comes from nowhere and stabs you, reopening old wounds. Sometimes you panic for fear that you are going backwards in your grief. You may feel as if you were returning to those days when you felt out of control. You have no wish to return to those troubled turbulent times. You have no desire to relive the stormy seas.

Then this grief, quite suddenly and without warning, may calm down. This is known as the grief recovery phase. You are still enduring the emotional suffering, yet it does not seem to be so turbulent. The reality is still setting in. The stormy sea has compromised in its fury. Those enormous and threatening waves have abated. You are surrounded by rolling whitecaps instead, lulling you in your quest of an ebb tide...the ebb tide of hope.

During this time, you may find that you have this relentless search for the person who has died. Yearning for the dead person and being preoccupied with the memories may lead to moments of intense anxiety. Sounds, sights, and smells tend to recall quite vividly that memory of your loved one.

One widow told me that she used to wake to the smell of frying bacon. "I could hear him whistling as he cracked the eggs. Joe's up cooking breakfast for me." She sleepily would get out of bed, and go to the kitchen. There was no one there. The harsh reality hit her. Joe has been dead for four months.

Visions, Visits, and Dreams

During this time, it is not unusual to have dreams about the person who has died. Some call them dreams, some call them visits from the spirit world, some call them visions and some call them memory pictures. They are part of the yearning and searching that mourners encounter during their first few years of mourning. They experience a sense of the dead person's presence. Some even confess that they see their dead loved one walking around in the house at night.

One little girl sees her dead father regularly and converses with him. Mom, thinking this was abnormal, sought professional help. When the psychiatrist asked the Mom if she thought he would hurt the little girl, the Mom replied, "No." "Then," commented the psychiatrist, "let it be."

This phenomenon is not uncommon. Widowers, widows, orphans, and parents who have experienced baby deaths all talk of these happenings. Most of them find them comforting. One young Mom dreamt that her recently deceased baby came down to her, kissed her and said, "Don't cry Mommy. I'm fine." She awoke the next morning, greatly rested, and calmly comforted.

Dreams about the dead person are often part of the experienced events at this time. Dreams are the unconscious effort of the survivor searching for the person who has died. I know of one teenager who is frequented with reoccurring dreams where his dead buddy would suddenly appear and play basketball on the driveway. His buddy would always speak to him in his dream saying, "I'm all right. Don't worry about me." At first, these dreams alarmed him, but when reassured that his dead friend would not harm him, the teen relaxed. The dreams eventually subsided.

Some widowers and widows have even experienced sexual encounters in their dreams. Some were initially unsettled and some were not. Some felt peaceful after their dreams. "It's their way of saying good-bye to you," is the general consensus of the bereaved who have these types of dreams.

One widower often had dreams about his deceased wife. She would visit him on numerous occasions and in the dreams they would become quite intimate. This is his story.

"After my wife was killed in an automobile accident, I had a very hard time dealing with everything. I got through the first year. About four months into the second year, I had a dream or vision one night.

In this dream, my wife and I were having a party at our house. All our children, parents, brothers, sisters, and close friends were there. During the evening my wife and I went upstairs to our bedroom. We made love and talked for about an hour. Then my wife said that it was time for her to go. We went downstairs. We went around and she said "good-bye" to all who were at the party. She turned to me and said, "Take care of the kids. You must get on with your life. You must keep going. I love you, and now, I must go."

I woke up. Her pillow was indented where she used to place her head. A light fragrance of her perfume lingered in the room. I felt comforted. From then on, I realized that I must continue to go forward, living one day at a time, knowing she was, and always will be with me."

Dream analysts will tell you that intimacy in dreams is all right. After all, your relationship with your partner, when alive, was an intimate one, was it not? This widower has

often thanked these dreams, or visits, for they have helped him cope with the reality of her sudden violent death, and helped turn his life around.

If you have experienced any of these types of dreams, visions or visits, enjoy them. This is all part of the natural process of grief. As you move on through your grief, your mourning characteristics may take on complete or partial disorganization, confusion, and yearning. It is part of the post-stormy sea symptoms of grieving. The vicious seas have ceased; the friendly, yet foreboding, waving whitecaps are here. Your encounter with the new reality of grief has arrived. It is called survival. It is known as ebb tide.

The Symphony of My Mind



I awake and find you there,
sitting quietly in the chair
With love and kindness in your eyes
I feel at peace, it is no surprise
But I need to ask, "is it really you?"

You gently take me by the hand,
leading me to the music stand
To sing for me the song you wrote,
orchestrated note for note
But I still ask you "is it really you?"

You smile and slowly fade away; I drift into another day
I feel at peace, it is no surprise.
I slowly open my eyes and
know it's you, it's really you.

Guilt and Regret Don't Should on Yourself

The bereaved are excellent at "shoulding" on themselves. Do any of these sound familiar to you?

I "should have" driven Alice to the hospital myself, instead of waiting for the ambulance to arrive; she might be alive now.

I "should have" stayed at home that night; George would probably be alive now.

I "should have" not insisted that we have another baby; if we had waited longer, the baby may have had a better chance of surviving.

I "should have" asked for a second opinion; another doctor may have been able to save him.

The "should have's" or the "if only's" are part of the mourning process. Some people call this guilt; others call it regret. There is a difference.

Regrets often get lumped in with guilt, making these emotions more difficult to deal with. Regrets are the things that you wish you had done or said. Examples are: "I wish I had taken her to the doctor sooner," or "I wish we had taken that trip," or "I wish I had gone to the hospital before she died."

Guilt, on the other hand, is what you feel when you believe you have done something wrong. You may feel guilty for having a fight with your son just before he was struck by a car and killed. You may feel guilty for telling a loved one to "go ahead and kill yourself if that's what you want," whereupon she did just that. One woman felt guilty for being the driver of

the car in which her husband was killed. Of course there are many reasons for people to feel guilty, some well founded, some not. You may feel guilty for being alive when your loved one is dead, as one mother told me she felt after the death of her child. The possibilities for feeling guilty or regretful are infinite. What you will want to do is to clarify in your own mind which it is you are dealing with: guilt or regret.

There are a number of things you can do to get relief from your feelings of guilt and regret.

Identify what is causing you to feel guilty or regretful. Take out a pencil and paper and on the paper list the following:

Regrets "If only's" "Should have's"	Guilt Actually killed someone

This simple exercise alone will give you some relief. If you want, find someone to share this with, someone who can be objective and will not inflict his or her judgments on you. Look at your list and see if there is something you can do about

some of them. This might be as simple as writing a letter or telephoning someone to say, "I'm sorry."

Be careful with hindsight. Now, after the fact, you may be feeling more rested, emotionally and physically, and it can be very easy to become judgmental of yourself. Remember to look back to the past events and remember how tired or exhausted you were feeling, and how much stress you were under and remember that you were doing the best you could under such difficult circumstances. Don't assign greater strength to yourself now than those circumstances would have allowed.

If you were actually guilty for taking someone else's life, look for ways to work off your guilt. I remember seeing a man who served time in prison for drinking and driving causing the life of a six year old. Upon release from prison, he vowed to make his very negative experience into a positive one. High schools and colleges in Ontario constantly ask him to come as a guest speaker telling the youth of his experiences as an alcoholic and as prisoner of a federal penitentiary.

I want you to know that you can find relief from this powerful feeling and that you can even discover emotional growth from it. Always reach out for help whenever you have a feeling that you fear is bigger than what you can handle. There is help out there waiting for you, but you need to take that first step and make the phone call.

Remember: you have done things in the past that you wish you could undo, but it is too late. You can, however, do new things in your life that will help you to reverse the image that you have of yourself. You can identify someone or some group of people who can use your capabilities, talents, or compassion. Then you can dedicate your time, energy and

attention to the needs of those others. You will not contribute money; you will give of yourself. You will experience, first-hand the benefits of giving, the pure pleasure that comes from increasing the quality of someone else's life. For you have not lived a perfect day....unless you have done something for someone who will never be able to repay you.

Time Distortion

Those who are mourning, often experience a distorted sense of time. This booklet is being sent to you six months after the death of your loved one. For some it may seem like only six hours; for others it may seem like six years. Many lose track of the time of day or even the day of the week. This is normal and is sometimes referred to by the bereaved as "going crazy."

By reminiscing the past, we try to acknowledge the present. We hope and pray that the future is kinder than both the past and the present. In the support groups, I strongly encourage people to share memories of the past with each other. This assists in freeing the mourner from the emotional investment of the past; it is therapeutic for a tolerable present and is helpful for a hopeful future.

Here is an example of this phenomenon. In the late eighties, as a new counsellor, I could not fathom how the recently bereaved were unable to make any type of decision. Even the simplest one, like deciding what to wear upon rising was impossible for them. One of the widows in our support groups shared this story with me.

"Every evening I set goals for myself, determined to get myself out of the 'mourning' rut. My intentions are good. The next day is a different story. The next morning I feel as if I was part of a dream. I am moving in slow motion, yet I feel as if I am running in the Boston Marathon. I am moving as fast as I

can; I have no control over my body. It will not move. And these are my best days!

There are other mornings when I think that I am getting out of bed, and am dismayed to find that I am still under the covers at six o'clock in the evening. It is as if my mind and body are not connected. The communication system between my mind and my body has completely shut down. My son has often commented that I look as if I am in a stupor.

I can honestly tell you that I have difficulty making plans from one minute to the next, let alone making plans for the next week."

With this widow's experience in mind, I caution you to respect how time distortion creates confusion. Knowing that by giving yourself permission to memorialize the past, the emotional time invested, will make possible a hopeful present and future.

Searching for a Meaning "The Why's?"

Closely related to this process of reviewing and reflecting is the search for meaning. This is an attempt to try to make sense out of the death events. The constant questions of "why me?" or "why him?" or "why now?" is the yearning we all experience when an event is threatening to our history and to our future.

With all of these questions, many times we seldom anticipate actually finding an answer. It is part of the process of grieving ...asking rhetorical questions. There could very well be many reasons why your loved one should or should not have died. Trying to find the rationale is a normal part of this process.

A young teen, who experienced the death of her father, her mother, and her grandmother within one year, often wonders, "Why? Why am I an orphan when all my friends still have both their parents?"

Her search to find the answer helps her tolerate her losses. Because pat answers are not very comforting, she explored other avenues to help her understand. Her medium was poetry. It helped her come to an understanding while exploring her philosophy of life, and renewed her determinations to make the best of life, as she knows it now. She has written many poems but this one best describes her innermost feelings.

Remember

In loving memory of
Mom (Janet), Dad (Donald), and Grandma Grace

I remember all the good times we had together
I remember their smiles
I remember everything they gave me,
But most of all,
I remember the love they gave me.

Tara Maracle
Age 14, Grade 8
J.C.Hill School

Copied with permission.

Is Death the Will of God, the Creator?

We wonder what happened to God. In some cases we question why God allowed the death to occur in the first place. Sometimes death shakes the very foundation of our being and our belief in a loving God. What kind of loving God would allow death?

A young father whose newborn son had recently died addressed this question to me. He had trouble fathoming the concept of a loving God, a loving Creator. At the funeral of his son, both he and his wife heard such platitudes as, "Be thankful he's in a better place," or "God needs more angels in Heaven...that's why God took him."

"Since when did Heaven have a population problem?" he thought.

Both he and his wife joined our support group. In one of the sessions, full of anger, he exploded, "No one knows HOW we feel. If I had a syringe full of grief I would inject it into everyone's veins; then they would know how we feel!" It was so spontaneous and so ridiculous an answer that the group burst out laughing. But he got his point across. Platitudes are not helpful at the time of death.

So where is this loving God? This question has been asked down through the ages. Some have answers, some have not.

I would like to share the following story with you. Many have found it comforting; hopefully you may also find it consoling.

A bereaved father, who recently buried his six-month-old daughter, struggled with, "Why, God?" He then told of a dream that he had one night in which God put before him his four children, including the infant who died. God said to this father, "One of your four children is to die and you get to choose which one."

He looked back at God and said, "I can't do that."

God repeated the statement, "One of your four children is to die; you get to choose which one."

The father looked at all four of his children and thought of how he loved each one of them and becoming angry, yelled back to God, "I love each and every one of my kids! I can't do that! You can't make me do that!"

And God responded, "I love each and every one of your kids too, and yet, somehow you think I can...choose which one is to die."



For those of you who may wish a more theological answer, and believe in a loving Creator, a loving God, here is a brief explanation.

Only good comes from God. Bad or evil comes from another source. God is Perfect Love, and has loved all of us from eternity.

God has borne us in God's mind from everlasting to everlasting. There was never a moment, while God lived and thought and loved, when this life, this person and their eternal destiny were not present to God, enfolded in God's all creative wisdom and embraced in God's divine love.

From all eternity God has seen us as someone belonging to God's eternal Word. We have always been enfolded in God's love, have already been eagerly welcomed by God. God's love has always awaited us and included us in the divine plan of salvation.

Because Perfect Love has to be returned by free choice, God gave us the greatest gift, the freedom to choose or as named by the theologians, "Free Will." With this free will, we develop a habit of saying "yes" to goodness or "no" to goodness.

This is known as the "fundamental option" theory. This is the name given for the persistent will or attitude that shapes a person's life: the basic intent to live as one who believes in goodness or a decline to do so. In other words, this orientation is established in a rooted loyalty to God, the Creator and becomes your set habit throughout life.

So the more you say "yes" to goodness, you are developing a habit of saying "yes" to God. For God, being Perfect Love, needs us for only one reason: to be loved.

As previously stated, evil comes from another source.

There are two evils: evils of nature and evils of humans. The paradigm (the ultimate) of human evils is the Holocaust.

God does not give pain, cancer, traffic accidents, or terrorist attacks. God did not create the Holocaust. However, when these tragedies happen to us, God is there. This loving God, as a loving parent, enters into the suffering of God's children and invites them to an eternal happiness.

For only good can come from a true loving parent.

In conclusion, God does not cause the death. Humans cause the death. But this same loving God invites the spirit to eternal happiness and to enter into eternal Love. Based on our fundamental option and free will, we can say "yes" or we can say "no" to God's plan.

A Voice

"They're just here for a little while," a voice deep down inside me said, "for you to love while they're alive, to grieve and mourn when they are dead.

Some may be teens or six years old; some reach the age of ninety-three.

Some may be in their mother's womb,
When it's time for them to come to me.

Despite how old your loved one is, their stay on earth, to you, is brief.

May memories of their warmth and love
Be comforts through your days of grief.

For when the soul at last departs...some think it's part of a
greater plan,
I'll help you through your loneliness.
I'll help you try to understand.

I know you're angry and you're hurt, and think
That life is all in vain.
And will you hate me when death comes,
To bring them back to me again?

I do not plan the death or life, of those I love
Who dwell on earth.
I also share your pain and sorrow.
I also join your joy at birth.

My love for you is unconditional.
My love for you is here to stay.
Please tell me of your woe and heartache
For I am with you night and day.

I am a kind and loving Spirit, who loves all
creatures great and small.
I love all people of all nations for...

I AM THE CREATOR
Of you all."

So How Am I Supposed To Feel After Six Months?

Many bereaved parents, teenagers, spouses and even children ask this question. What kinds of feelings are normal? How am I supposed to feel after six months? The answer is "Quite honestly, I don't know." Just like every human being is completely different, so too, is every grief reaction.

When grief comes, feelings appear out of nowhere. Feelings you never dreamed you had, suddenly and without warning, surface. Let me assure you that feelings are neither right nor wrong; they just are.

Most people during a grieving time in their life are egocentric. This is a psychological term for thinking of yourself all of the time. You are and need to be the centre of topic and attention. Everything will be related to you. You may resent anyone talking about someone else's problems. Inside, you will protest, "Don't tell me your problems. Mine are ten times worse than yours will ever be!"

Some will accuse you of being selfish. This is not selfishness. This is called survival. When you are attacked, your whole being reacts to survive. This is a built-in defense mechanism that the body has.

Let me give you an example. Eating is necessary to staying alive. No one ever calls eating selfish. Yet eating is survival.

Letting your feelings out is also survival. Reviewing and recalling the death events over and over again is necessary. Talking is survival.

Pain

As a nurse studying anatomy and physiology, I came to the conclusion quite quickly that the human body is a magnificent work of art. It is the perfect chemical plant. It is physics at it's best, with a superb sensory department and a psyche that is still largely a mystery. With such a gift, it was wise that the Creator put in some safety devices, such as pain receptors and a neurological system that boggles the mind. Pain is often perceived negatively, but without pain, how would we ever know that we were ill?

When you have a headache, the entire function of the body hinges on the headache. Ask those who suffer migraines or tension headaches. Nothing else matters except the pain in your head. Headaches, symptoms of something askew, dominate the entire being. The cure is usually rest or medication. The recovery takes time, but it eventually does happen.

The same holds true for emotional pain. During your time of grief, your whole system reacts and tries to recover. It tries to bring you back to your usual state of well being. The entire function of your body hinges on the pain in your heart. Just like a headache, recovery takes time, but it eventually does happen. It is called survival.

Survival

You are still within the perimeters of grieving and are probably wondering if you will ever survive. Six months of complete separation from your loved one may seem like an eternity; how do you get through the year ahead? How do people do it?

Parents of a child who died of cancer at the age of four, shared with me their guidelines to survival. It did not take the pain away, but it helped them with their grief.

1. Acknowledge the death
2. Lean into the pain
3. Know that you are not alone in your grief
4. Be patient with yourself
5. Know the ups and downs
6. Get lots of rest
7. Participate in decision making
8. Know that Sundays may be the worst day
9. Be aware of suicidal thoughts
10. Join support groups

Acknowledge the Death

In order for healing to occur, there must be the basic recognition of the death. Death is permanent and irreversible. Until you come to grips with the reality of the situation, it will be an impossibility for the grief process to commence. Some, even after six months, have a difficult time acknowledging the death. They have a hard time saying the word "dead." If you are one of the ones who finds this difficult, you may continue to expect that the deceased will return to life. Not knowing the status of a loved one leaves us in a type of limbo because we do not know how to proceed with our lives. Did you ever wonder why funeral directors encourage you to have a viewing of the body? Did you ever wonder why we spend so much time, money, and effort trying to recover bodies from plane crashes, earthquakes, and human disasters? We, as human beings, need to visually see the evidence of the death. Once this is done, the death then becomes confirmed in our mind. Only then, can we start to grieve.

Lean Into The Pain

The pain of grief is like a densely treed forest. We can try to go over it, around it, or under it. We can choose to ignore it. The forest, just like the pain of death, will still be there. We have to go through it to conquer it, to get to the other side. We have to lean into the pain of death. Many of us try and minimize our loss or focus on other family members' grief and not pay attention to our own. Some of us keep ourselves so busy that we never perceive or feel the pain. Believe me, all of the actions above will come back and will cost us dearly.

How do we lean into the pain?

Leaning into the pain may be equated with enduring a headache without analgesics. It means admitting that we are hurting. Although we may find ourselves frightened by the pain, it is better to feel it. We will not find it bottomless. We have to experience the desolation and feel the hurt. It means talking about it with a trusted family member, friend, or support group. If there is anger or frustration, let it go.

Know That You Are Not Alone In Your Grief

There are four personality types when it comes to managing stress or grief. One-third of the population:

- Moves towards people.
- Moves away from people.
- Moves against people.

Some do all three.

If we are the type who moves toward people, we will reach out, sharing our grief in an atmosphere of friendship and hospitality. This can be done with a friend, a family member, or a group of people. Support groups are just that. They are a group of people united in grief and sharing their grief experiences. They find comfort and solace with each other.

If we are the type who moves away from people, then we deal with our grief in isolation. Some people are very private and this is the only way that may be comfortable for them to handle stress and bereavement. This type of personality could eventually suffer from unresolved grief.

If we are the type of person who moves against people, we may find ourselves completely isolated from society. Usually this type of person has some form of unresolved anger or hostile feelings towards the deceased loved one or toward the circumstances surrounding the situation. Knowing which type of personality we are may help us with resolving our grief.

Then some people do all three. The only time for concern is if they are a threat to themselves or to others. If this happens, intervention must be taken. The family physician, the social worker, or local police must be notified.

Remember:

Joy shared, doubles the pleasure
Sorrow shared, halves the pain.

Quote from Rev. Ron Synnott

Be Patient With Yourself

When in a stressful situation, most of us like to take control and get over it as soon as possible. Unless we are a masochist, and very few of us are, not one of us would ask for the type of pain that comes after the loss of someone loved. Keep in mind that grief is a process and it takes time, lots and lots of time to resolve grief issues. The pain will lessen in time and duration, and over the years, will not occupy your every thought.

In this age of fast foods and disposable items, it is hard to accept the fact that anything takes time anymore. But it does. Although there is no official time limit on grief, two years is the minimum time. You will never get over the death of a loved one, but you will learn to live without them. Learning to live without them is called grief.

Healing Process Has Its Ups And Downs

The healing process is not like climbing stairs, one foot after the other, always going upward. It is more like being struck by a saw tooth lightning bolt. It has us zigzagging all over the place, full of ups and downs, progressions and regressions, dramatic leaps, and depressing backslides.

One of the young mothers who experienced numerous baby deaths, shared this with me:

“Enjoying the pregnancy for each of my babies was the most energizing experience of my life.

Mourning the death for each of my babies was the most draining experience of my life.”

I have spent the last four years bouncing from the elation of pregnancy, to the despair of death. Seven pregnancies and seven deaths in four years have left its toll. My body has been physically abused. My psyche has been emotionally raped.”

Like the jagged edge of a lightening bolt, our grief haphazardly strikes and leaves us grounded and mired in muck.

Get Lots Of Rest

Those who have experienced the death of a loved one testify that sleep habits become erratic. Some sleep all day, and are unable to sleep at night. Some are able to drop off to sleep at the drop of a hat, only to find themselves awake and fidgety a few hours later. Others maintain that sleep is impossible until the wee hours of the morning. Then they are faced with the added difficulty of rising at the allotted time. Sleep deprivation can cause bizarre behaviour, compound depression, and increase anxiety. Some feel as if they are on a merry-go-round, never rested, always agitated.

One of the widowers had difficulty getting to sleep at night. To combat this, he would go out and walk. Each evening he went to the local shopping mall and walked and walked and walked. It made him feel much better. Then he began to realize that he was receiving suspicious looks from the proprietors of the shops and the security staff.

He switched to driving. He drove miles, aimlessly going nowhere. When he felt drowsy, he would return home to catch a few hours sleep. His anxiety level decreased; so too, did his gas mileage. But he felt that it was worth it.

Take time and arrange your life so that you get lots of rest.

Try scheduling rest into your day. Do not become heavily involved in extra activities for awhile. Remember that rest is the guardian of health. Invest in you.

Participate In Decision Making

The last six months have provided you with enough changes. Do not invite any more. Know that your judgment is clouded. You are not thinking straight. It is impossible to make clear decisions at this time. Postpone major decisions, like selling the house or moving down south. If you are a recent widow, you are an easy target for predators. They will pounce on you trying to separate you and your money. The following is a prime example.

On one of the streets on the Hamilton Mountain, a disreputable paving crew sought out unsuspecting widows. They gave their sales pitch on paving the residents' driveways, asked for a down payment, and absconded with the money.

One such widow was in our support group. She was in fine spirits and was out gardening the morning the paving crew came around. She and her dead husband had always wanted the driveway paved. "Oscar would be so proud of me," she thought. So she gave them a down payment of \$100.00 cash. When she asked them for a receipt, the man replied that he had forgotten the receipt book in his truck down the street, and would return in five minutes with her receipt. She never saw them again. She brought the problem to the group. One of the widows, a lawyer, tried to track down the company. There was no such listing. The widow was out \$100.00. A bitter lesson was learned.

Remember, think twice before making any major decisions or changes. Caution is the best form of defense.

Know That Sundays Are The Worst

In our Canadian culture, Sunday is synonymous with family. Sunday is the time for religious worship, luncheons, family picnics, B.B.Q's, boating, a Sunday drive in the country, a trip to Niagara Falls, a concert at the local band shell, attending a Blue Jay's game, cutting the grass, painting the house, reading a book, watching T.V., or just plain lounging around. Sundays are for sharing and caring. Sundays are family time.

Sundays are also a constant, cruel reminder that someone, with whom you used to share Sundays, is gone forever. How do you cope?

Coping With Sundays

Helpful hints from the bereaved

- Busy yourself with activities that you never used to do on Sunday
- Start a Sunday Support Group for Solo Spouses
- Go away on a day trip
- Help out at a local nursing home
- Volunteer time for a charity
- Visit the cemetery
- Take up a new activity like hiking, bird watching, biking, power walking
- Visit the zoo
- Get a pet
- Become a Big Brother or a Big Sister
- Join a sports activity that you always wanted to but never had the time for
- Help out at a local school or library
- Become involved with the Canadian Cancer Society, Diabetes Society, Heart and Lung Association etc.

Be Aware Of Suicidal Thoughts

Following the death of a loved one, many experience survivor guilt. They feel guilty for a variety of reasons. They yearn to join their loved one; others prefer that they had died instead. Some call this having suicidal thoughts; in actuality, it is commonly referred to as having a "death wish."

A death wish is a natural symptom of the pain of grief. This is normal and there is no need to take action. This will pass.

However, if these thoughts of suicide and self-destruction persist over time or take on definite planning and structure, the need for professional intervention becomes crucial. Suicidal thoughts can sometimes be an expression of wanting to find relief from the pain of grief. If you are afraid that these impulses are getting out of hand, call the operator, ask her to connect you with a local suicide prevention agency, and tell her that this is an emergency.

Join Support Groups

In the last book, I suggested that grief support groups are one way of helping us. The purpose of a support group is to give you a sense that you are not alone in your sorrow. Most bereaved have said that they find comfort in being with other people who have had similar experiences. Perhaps for the first time, they find someone who truly appreciates how they feel. Other bereaved people understand the problems associated with the death of a loved one. Through talking and sharing their stories, they vocalize and ventilate their intense feelings. They lift the lid off of their emotional pressure cookers. By doing so, they validate each other's feelings.

"It's good to know that there is someone else who feels that way too. I thought that I was the only one like this. I really thought that I was losing it."

In some grief support groups, the people involved become close friends and this helps ease the loneliness that comes from the death of a loved one. Loneliness is a sense of isolation. Those experiencing grief and who are mourning often feel misunderstood. Relatives and well-meaning friends want you to "get on with your life" and encourage you to "get back to normal." This is your normal. Your life has changed forever. But in time this change will become a "new normal."

Groups provide confidential, friendly surroundings where everyone normalizes your feelings, and no one minimizes them. The bereaved who participate in these groups say that it is in this environment that they are reassured that they are not going crazy, and that the anger and depression that they may be feeling at this time are part of the grief recovery.

Testimonials From The Bereaved

George - a widower

"My wife passed away four months ago. Her death left me devastated and angry with God. My good life, as I knew it, had been destroyed. Every day I realize that for the rest of my living days I will never see and talk to my wife again. I cannot hug and kiss her anymore. I wonder if I would be better off just not to wake up the next morning. It might be better than constantly living with my bitter pain and sorrow.

Since my wife died, I am living by myself without any close relatives close by. I am terrified by the thought of what will become of my house and me if I should get really sick for a long period of time. This daily worry is weighing heavily on my mind.

Despite all the stress I have experienced since my wife's death, my health is holding up well and I rarely see a doctor. Being a loner by nature, I hardly miss people. Most of my old friends have either died or moved away to other cities. The neighbours who are living next to me are mostly new here and I hardly know them. I have always been perfectly content to just having my wife around me because she was all I ever needed.

I am very grateful for the opportunity to be able to attend the weekly grief meetings. Here I am in the company of men and women who have also lost their spouses and are grieving as I am. At these meetings I can bare my soul and share my innermost feelings. I can have a good cry without having to feel embarrassed.

I greatly value the advice of the facilitator, which is freely given whenever I ask for it. When I go home after these meetings, I always feel good and greatly comforted. Hopefully, the tense days of the past will gradually become a faded memory as I move on to a fresh new time in my life."

Dorothy - Widow

These were some of the questions I asked when my husband, Barry, died in April of 1999 - just shy of his 55th birthday. You see, his death was a surprise - he was alive and healthy that morning when I left for work but by 4:20 p.m. that afternoon he was dead, leaving me with a 13 year old son.

This wasn't supposed to happen this way. My whole life was changing - too quickly.

I was lost. I didn't know where to turn. I was one of the lucky ones - Barry and I were a happily married couple for 25 years; he was my best friend - we could talk about anything - except his death.

Barry's health had never been good (if you count 1 stroke, 2 heart attacks, an aortic aneurysm and a Grand Mal seizure in five years good) but I always knew he was going to survive those medical problems.

However, the seizure (which happened ten days before his death, almost to the hour) scared me the most. I wasn't surprised when the doctors told me that he didn't survive the surgery for the thoracic aneurysm. I knew this time it wasn't going to be as easy as the other times.

My husband had taken care of our home and son while I worked (we were one of the early versions of the reversed role parents). All of a sudden, I was a widow, a single parent, an employee, a sister, a friend, but no longer a wife.

I was a stay-at-home mom, cooking, cleaning and dealing with how to put up a picture on the wall. It's amazing how it's those little things that get to you the most. I could run an office, work for 17 people at one time but couldn't hang a picture on the wall.

Instead, I focused on giving comfort to not only my son but those around me who were in shock - it was a good way for me to cope with my loss - it's called DENIAL! I knew my son was suffering and he needed help; I was coping.

A friend researched and gave me some information on bereavement counselling - a grief counsellor, Cheryl McQueen - and I contacted her for my son.

Cheryl came to my home and talked to my son, helping him deal with the fact that it wasn't his fault that his daddy died. Ed was getting better, I wasn't.

One day, Cheryl talked with me and two hours later we were still talking. I found that I didn't know how to grieve, how to be a bereaved, how to let others comfort me, and that I didn't have to be strong for everyone. I could lean on others - even my son - when I needed to be comforted. I didn't know that he needed that too.

I attended Cheryl's grief support group in the fall of 1999 - it was one of the hardest things but also the kindest thing I have ever done.

Through Cheryl's patient counselling, I learned that I could expect to have days where I could laugh but just as many days when I cry, and crying was okay. I learned that it was all right when I couldn't just all of a sudden stop crying and missing my husband just because six months had passed by.

We got through the first year. And on the anniversary of my husband's death, I spoke at a business networking function about my business. For you see, I had decided to start my own business from home - something my husband and I talked about prior to his death. I spoke as a tribute to myself for having gone through a whole year and was still sane (well...most of the time!)

Barry's 56th birthday is coming up - the second one he has missed; I still miss him terribly - that probably will never change but I have adapted my life to fit these changes.

"There are still days when I can do nothing but sit and cry - the loss of a friend's parent distresses me to no end - but I continue to draw on the strength that I gained through the grief counselling.

I strongly urge anyone out there who is struggling with a death in the family, or who is a primary caregiver to a loved one who is disabled or chronically ill, or who is divorced or separated to attend the grief support groups.

You'll probably cry and laugh a little, you may hear something you need to hear - whatever. I guarantee you'll come away with more than you came with - hope that there is life after grief, faith to keep you going when things are going tough and maybe more."

Mary and John - bereaved parents

"At first we felt strange. We didn't know if we could share our feelings with strangers. As we became more relaxed, we came to understand that our grief was real and that we were not going crazy.

We felt by speaking with others who have had similar experiences, we would understand and be understood. With the individuals in the group, we were able to relate to them very well, even if the circumstances around the death of our babies were very different. We could all understand each other."

Rose - adult mourning the death of her mother

"At first I thought that I was "looney tunes", you know, a complete "stir-fry." I was also seeking help from a "shrink" and did not seem to be going anywhere. I love this group. I enjoyed the sharing, the caring, the laughter, and the tears. I shall miss the group. Thank you."

Mark - a teenager grieving the death of his mother

“Coming here each week helped me come to some sort of understanding of myself. Everyone has experienced the death of someone loved, and somehow everyone understood how I felt. To concentrate on school work was almost an impossibility, and then I asked to come to the grief support group.

Cheryl called and talked to my teachers and whatever she said to them worked. They backed off in their demands and ironically, my marks have gone up. We laugh a lot; we cry a little. We play our guitars; we sign our songs. Our healing is awesome.”



Grief Support Groups

The silent tears fill
the echoes of the room.
The circle of shared grief
enshronds them like a tomb.
The pain and loss
and unspoken anger
drowns away the sounds of life,
and colour,
age and station,
joined by a common thread.

A child, a wife, a husband, a father, a mother,
a dear friend, lost to each of us for now.

Engulfing grief does not happen
until we hear the other's pain as loudly as our own.

Can we begin to share the healing and lift a heavy load?

Grief has stolen much from each of them,
who claim this circle every week.

Yet as we shed a tear
or
gently hold a hand in need,
the beginning of healing
through reaching unselfishly,
will lighten our hearts
and show us,
the way to the light,
that shines
through the dark of day.

Conclusion

For those who move toward people, they will seek out people who will listen without ridicule and without judgment. They may be relatives or friends. They may be a small community, which provides confidential, friendly surroundings. Here the bereaved can come and feel comfortable talking about their grief.

At first, talking about your loved one's death will be very difficult. You may be able to talk about the facts of the death, but not the emotional impact that it has had on you.

If you find yourself talking about your loved one's death in a factual way, rather than in a way that conveys your emotions, you may remind yourself that you can get behind the reportorial part of the loss to the core of the loss by using a vocabulary which permits emotion: I feel, I need, I wish, I miss rather than I think.

The listener who will be the most helpful to you will be someone who is nonjudgmental, accepting, able to hear the bad as well as the good, and not afraid of anger.

Remember, we cry not only when we are sad, but also when we feel despair, great happiness, exhaustion, extreme frustration, surprise, or a number of other conditions and emotions.

Crying is a necessary biological component. Crying helps relieve emotional stress. Holding back tears causes additional stress, which may result in physical and psychological symptoms. In fact, tears remove from the body toxic substances, which are caused by stress. If emotional tension is not relieved, it can exacerbate existing conditions

such as high blood pressure, gastric and duodenal ulcers, colitis, allergies, and cardiovascular diseases.

Whatever feelings you express or experience will pass after awhile. When such expressions are especially powerful or prolonged, they are physically tiring, and, as one person said "just make a person go numb, eventually." But it is very important to recognize that in the overall course of your grief these expressions allow you to lighten your burden of grief. When you cry and express your grief, it loses its power over you, strange as that may seem.

Support groups have been and will increasingly continue to be, places of transition for those surviving a death. They are a safe environment in which one can leave behind more restrictive traditional behaviour and allow oneself to deal with innermost painful feelings.

The restless yearnings, the visions, the dreams, and the "should have's", are all part of the grief of six months. Sometimes they disappear; sometimes they don't. Just when you think that you are getting on with your life, you are unsuspectedly thrust into the crest of a relentless wave of grief and mourning. And then, suddenly, without warning, the calm comes. The sun sets; the waves cease. You are lulled into the ebb tide of hope, searching and seeking new channels.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cheryl McQueen is a Registered Nurse and a Grief Counsellor, with extensive experience in critical care, pediatrics, and psychiatric nursing. She is a graduate of St. Joseph's School of Nursing in Hamilton, and obtained her Master's Degree from Regis College, University of Toronto.

Cheryl established Bereavement Services Support & Education in the Greater Hamilton area in 1988. In 1991, she joined forces with Richard Anderson of R.H.B. Anderson Funeral Homes Ltd. to provide follow-up to the bereaved in the Haldimand-Norfolk counties.

Since then Cheryl has facilitated many grief support groups including groups for children and senior citizens. She is also funded by Richard Anderson to provide grief education workshops and crisis intervention for schools, communities and the workplace.

She has developed and written many workbooks for the bereaved, including "Wee Kids Grieve 2" and "When Mom & Dad Separate" for children six to twelve years of age.

Cheryl's most recent publication, "When Someone Dies - A Kid's Book About Funerals and Feelings" is a colouring book explaining the funeral home procedure to children ages four to nine.

She resides in Dundas, Ontario with her husband Nairn and two sons, Mark and David.

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